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Anagrams of the Body: Hybrid Texts and the Question of Postmodernism in the Literature and Film of Canada

by

Monique Yvonne Tschofen ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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The text itself, a diagrammatic and not an imitative structure, can reveal itself in the form of a body, split into fetish objects, into erotic sites. All these movements attest to a *figure* of the text, necessary to the bliss of reading. Similarly, and even more than the text, the film will *always* be figurative (which is why films are still worth making) — even if it represents nothing. (Roland Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text 56)

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **Anagrams of the Body: Hybrid Texts and the Question of Postmodernism in the Literature and Film of Canada** submitted by Monique Yvonne Tschofen in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

"Anagrams of the Body: Hybrid Texts and the Question of Postmodernism in the Literature and Film of Canada" contributes to the critical discourse about postmodernity in Anglophone and Francophone Canada (or rather, English Canada and Québec) initiated by scholars such as Linda Hutcheon and Janet Paterson. Drawing from the work of theorists such as Walter Benjamin, Marshall McLuhan and Jean Baudrillard who describe the phenomenological, epistemological, and ideological changes that occur when distinct media meet and cross-fertilize, this dissertation brings together contemporary novels and films to address the particular ways that mechanical and electronic forms of reproduction have reconfigured the textual landscape.

Close examination and analysis of metafictional strategies and "virtual" hybridity in films about writing and writing about films by Jean-Claude Lauzon, Hubert Aquin, and Atom Egoyan, uncovers the monstrous workings of a material and symbolic economy that involves reproduction, consumption, exchange, recycling, and discarding. At the same time, the enquiry into the relationship between contemporary culture and cultural technologies traces the way the valences of such concepts as fragmentation and wholeness, originality and repetition, as well as the social and cultural values ascribed to human bodies and their

labour, respond to the encounter of different cultural technologies.

Chapter One is an introduction that sketches out the theoretical context of the enquiry in relation to the questions of postmodernism posed by Fredric Jameson and Ihab Hassan. The four subsequent chapters are organized to trace a transformation in the trope of the body as it becomes increasingly intertwined in tropes of technologies of reproduction. Chapter Two considers economies of recycling in relation to the excremental body imagery in Jean-Claude Lauzon's Léolo. Chapter Three considers the body stamped out in relation to the idea and practice of seriality in David Fincher's film Seven and Hubert Aquin's Trou de mémoire. Chapter Four investigates the body de/composed in Hubert Aquin's Neige noire through a consideration of excessive practices that reveal the death of language and the death of the body. Chapter Five examines the displaced and replaced body in Atom Egoyan's Calendar and concentrates on several practices of disappearance. The final Chapter Six serves as a brief conclusion that suggests some of the epistemological and ethical questions the reading of these texts raises, and articulates the stakes of the explosive crossings and confrontations of media in hybrid texts.

Acknowledgments

. . . absolutely incomprehensible if I were not forced to confess that I suffer from a morbid horror of the pen, and that this work is for me an experience of sheer torture, quite out of proportion to its relative unimportance. (Ferdinand de Saussure, qtd. in Starobinski 3)

The best part of this lengthy process now brought back into proportion is that I am now able to acknowledge the people who helped transform horror into insight, torture into pleasure. I have had the good fortune to work with thoughtful and sensitive scholars throughout my studies. My supervisors, E.D. Blodgett and Jonathan Hart, have been as generous with their vast knowledge and deep understanding as they have been with their time, energy, and commitment. Above all, I am deeply grateful for their faith in my work and their patience; although they have guided my progress conscientiously, they also allowed me the luxury of following my own twisted paths to arrive at my own conclusions. Committee members Paul Dubé, Bill Beard, and Claudine Potvin, and Daniel Castillo-Durante, George Lang, and Anthony Purdy, have consistently challenged my thinking, shared their critical insights, and encouraged me to move forward. Since my earliest studies, Nasrin Rahimieh and Marina Allemano have given me the most tangible and valuable intellectual and personal support. I am also indebted to Sneja Gunew for productive dialogues during my annual visits to UBC, to Joseph Pivato for his ongoing commitment to engage me in ambitious collaborations, and to Linda Hutcheon for her thorough and helpful engagement with this project.

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Preville, Marc Furstenau, and most recently, Sheridan Bullman, breathed fresh air into my dusty lungs at critical moments; their passions restored my lost powers of speech and laughter, and remapped for me the realm of the possible. Neesh Pannu, Michelle Bohning, Joy Sweeting, and Michelle Lomberg are truest friends, and have shown me constancy and commitment through times of grief and glee. Adien Dubbelboer, Chris Gibbins, and Carolyn Guertin, are my most valued editors, and true partners in crime. Marc Vasey taught me to fly, and opened up so many doors leading out into the wide world. My brilliant (and wondrously helpful) sister, Kirsten Tschofen Pelletier, teaches me how to be at home and patient, wherever I am. Many other marvellous people must be acknowledged, and I wish to thank especially Nat Hardy, Larry Neufeld, Barbra Churchill, the noble citizens of Florence apartments (John Plews, Andrew Brown, Tara Wilson, Annette Cannell, and Sandra Martell), Dean Bamber, Kerry Powell, Paul Martin, Patricia Badir, and Hélène and Dale Kalbfleisch.

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Chapter One:

Introduction

I.

> **It must not be supposed that atoms can be linked together into anagrams, chronograms, acrostics, figured grids, and mazes. If that were so, you would see monsters coming into being everywhere. (Jackson)**

In this dissertation, I read and connect a number of Canadian texts that are haunting, disturbing, spectacular, and monstrous. Before outlining my chapters, I will sketch out the context of my enquiry and where my work is situated. My intention is not to synthesize another theory of media interrelations, nor is it to define once and for all the Canadian postmodern. This project is a reading in the way Roland Barthes conceives of reading – as analysis, as unravelling of the tissue of the text: "what will be noted is, across these artificial articulations, the shifting and repetition of the signifieds" (S/Z 14). At the centre of my readings lies an interest in describing how economies of cultural production and reproduction are figured in self-reflexive and hybrid texts. Textual hybridity is taken here in a large sense; for the purposes of this discussion, hybrid texts do not merely blend and blur generic categories, but rather represent and enact an encounter (often confrontational and explosive) between two distinct

technologies of representation. Other interarts relations are considered briefly, but their full exploration is left to later projects. Because the novel and film are heterogenous forms to begin with, and each grows from the debris of purer, and more culturally-sanctioned forms alongside specific technological innovations, their confrontation and blending can be considered as representative of a number of successive crises in representation wrought by mechanical and digital technologies in the twentieth century. The hybrid texts I explore here cause "text and image to realign themselves in relation to each other and to the world" (Guertin). However, the realignment is virtual. One medium is always dominant and manifest, and one is always virtual, translated, and often betrayed. When stitched together, distorted and yet preternaturally powerful, much like Frankenstein's famous creation, these hybrid texts reflect monstrous practices of reproduction on a number of different levels – representational, social, and physical. An examination of the tensions, translations, and exchanges

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For explorations of the tension between word and image, see Mitchell Stephens, "The Rise of the Image The Fall of the Word, and W.J.T. Mitchell, Picture Theory. For an explanation of how the novel emerges in relation to printing technologies, see Robert Alter, Partial Magic. For a discussion of the development of the cinema from other, rival arts, see Brigitte Peucker, Incorporating Images.

between the two systems reveals real and pervasive consequences for our everyday lives.

Four hybrid texts from English- and French-Canada lie at the heart of my discussion: Jean-Claude Lauzon's Léolo, Hubert Aquin's Neige Noire and Trou de mémoire, Atom Egoyan's Calendar. However, a substantial section of chapter Three is dedicated to a reading of an American film by director David Fincher, Seven. This transgression of national boundaries is intentional and suggests my desire to situate Canadian cultural practices within a larger context. Canadian culture, despite the wishes of many, is never hermetically closed, but rather exists in an often parasitical, often symbiotic, and often destructive relationship with other cultures. I do not wish to succumb to what Jonathan Hart has called "theoretical mercantilism" by merely importing foreign cultural and theoretical paradigms and applying them to Canadian texts. I do believe, however, that because of its position on the margins of the New World, the Canadian scene offers a locus

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Walter Benjamin argues in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" that as the "manner in which human sense perception is organized, [and] the medium in which it is accomplished" changes, so too does "humanity's entire mode of existence" (222). Marshall McLuhan concurs: "All media work us over completely. They are so pervasive in their personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical, and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered. The medium is the massage." (The Medium is the Massage 26)

from which to interrogate the blind spots of what is too often a monolithic theoretical discourse spoken from various "centres." The dialogue of Canadian and American practices thus offers an arena to test the limits of multiple forms of social and cultural knowledge.

All of the novels about the film image, and films about the written word that I analyze here test and push at limits as they reflect and exploit the confrontation of two media. The trope of the human body is insistently invoked to self-reflexively figure the economy of textual hybridity. The figuring of text as body (or body as text) is not at all original, but its very repetitiveness makes it particularly relevant to a cultural moment characterized in part by the conservative recycling of past forms, in part by an economy of excess – excess production, excess consumption, excess pleasure, excess pain. This trope metaphorizes – that is, displaces as well as refigures – issues relating to practices of re/production and destruction, creativity and recycling, agency and atomization. As such, it serves as an apt index of our cultural economy in the later part of the twentieth century.

II.

Anne Friedberg suggests in her book Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern that postmodernity evolves out of

the technologies of the cinema – a mass-produced and infinitely reproducible art form that commodifies a gaze mobilized in time and space (179). According to Friedberg, early cinema already contains within it the aesthetic, economic, and ideological features that postmodernist culture later reproduces. In other words, the newness of the cinematic medium instigated the culture that was later to follow, and conversely, the culture that followed retains the traces of the new technology of the cinema. Representation and technology of representation are, in Friedberg's model, mutually informing. The implications of Friedberg's connections, which resonate with the playful a-chronology of Lyotard's famous dictum in "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?" that "*Post modern* would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future [*post*] anterior [*modo*]," are substantial (46). To grant such a relationship between postmodern culture and cinema means that an examination of postmodern literature must necessarily be attuned to the global impact of technologies of reproduction such as film. So, even beyond an

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In an earlier article, "Cinema and the Postmodern Condition," Friedberg writes: "The gradual shift into postmodernity is marked, I argue, by the increased centrality of the mobilized and virtual gaze as a fundamental feature of everyday life. . . . Cinema and television become readable not just as symptoms of a "postmodern condition," but as contributing causes" (60-1).

acknowledgment that literature and film do intersect and overlap in historically and theoretically relevant ways, the decision to deal with both media (literature and film) in this dissertation permits me to describe competing modes of representation as technologies implicated in a material and symbolic economy that involves reproduction, consumption, exchange, recycling, and discarding. Because my interest is in hybridity and heterogeneity, the texts I analyze here are chosen because they explicitly negotiate both media through a nexus of similar tropes and figures, through similar auto-reflexive strategies, and through similar economies.

III.

This study concentrates on a period of thirty years, from the 1960s to the late 1990s. Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon state that

> evidently *something* important is . . . happening in this last part of the twentieth century, as a result of which... . society and culture in . . . Western Europe and North America, are moving along different paths, into different mindsets from those offered us by the Enlightenment and even by later models of modernity. (viii)

They use the term "postmodernity" to describe this "something." It is crucial, however, to resist the urge to

define the postmodern "something" in terms of a schism or rupture from the past. My readings of Canadian postmodern texts stress repetition as a structuring principle; what is happening might have origins elsewhere and elsewhen, but in the contemporary scene, replay is performative, transformative, and as a consequence, originary. There is a paradox at the core of claims of historical ruptures and epistemic shifts at a moment when cultural production is involved in a frenzy of various modalities of reproduction: plagiarism, borrowing, "frank confiscation, quotation, exerptation, accumulation and repetition of already existing images" need to be considered carefully (Crimp 53).

Umberto Eco suggests an intriguing approach to postmodern "aesthetics of seriality" in The Limits of Interpretation (84). Drawing his key metaphor from the technological medium that determines the twentieth century, Eco relates the era of electronics to practices of repetition: "instead of emphasizing the phenomena of shock, interruption, novelty, and frustration of expectations, [the era of elecronics] would produce a return to the continuum, the Cyclical, the Periodical, the regular" (96). Electricity produces and regulates a tension between shock

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See Tim Armstrong, Modernism, Technology and the Body, for a thorough examination of the impact electric systems had on the reconceptualization of the body.

and cycle, interruption and continuity, novelty and regularity, Eco suggests, and from this, he argues against the traditional modernist understanding of cultural history in terms of a dialectic between scheme and innovation (97). One of the advantages of Eco's approach is that he models a diachronic examination of cultural practices that does not resort to dialectics or theories of rupture for explanations. Indeed, as Linda Hutcheon remarks in A Poetics of Postmodernism, "There is no dialectic in the postmodern" (x). However, in seeking to find a balance between these two explanatory approaches to postmodern cultural history, Eco abandons the metaphor of electricity in favour of a trope linked to an older technology. To replace dialectics as a model for understanding the relationship between schemes and variations, Eco proposes the literal knotting of the two poles or extremes. This model is perhaps too synthetic, and although its allusions to metaphors of texts, tissues, and unravellings are rewarding, they do not fully convey the technological innovations that shape the practice of seriality in postmodern culture.

Arthur Kroker and David Cook provide another intriguing and useful metaphor to explain the path traced by postmodern culture – the edge. The "postmodern scene," a legacy inherited from Nietzsche, is described in terms of a

slightly different kind of negotiation of extreme opposites:

> . . . we are living on the violent edge between ecstacy and decay; between the melancholy lament of post-modernism over the death of the grand signifiers of modernity — consciousness, truth, sex, capital, power — and the ecstatic nihilisim of ultramodernism; between the body as a torture-chamber and pleasure-palace; between fascination and lament. (Postmodern Scene 9)

Through this spatial metaphor, Kroker and Cook's model characterizes postmodern culture itself and its place in cultural history by a solidly ambiguous in-betweenness rather than resolution or synthesis. Their image of the edge thus proposes a different kind of configuration of knowledge, cultural production, and history. The edge may not be shocking in the way that electricity can be, but it can be sharp, incisive, and penetrating. Their idea of a "violent edge" thus connotes much of the latent and manifest aggressivity of the postmodern culture that I investigate here.

Once the "edge" is acknowledged in a postmodern text, it no longer becomes appropriate to ask whether it should be labelled as part of a dominant or counter-culture, whether it inscribes or resists master-narratives, whether it innovates or homogenizes. Hovering between extremity and

compromise, these texts enact a specific kind of politics and demand a specific kind of reading strategy. Aquin's writings, along with the films of Atom Egoyan and Jean-Claude Lauzon, simultaneously carry explosive and implosive potentials. Reactionary and conservative, patriarchal and feminist, offensive and delightful, these texts replace binaristic logic of either/or with a more subtle logic of both/and which does not force contradiction, ambiguity, and indeterminacy into a dialectical resolution. Analysis thus requires a double optic which forces the reader or spectator to also hover on a violent edge.

IV.

If the texts are arguably part of the "postmodern scene," my readings of these texts pick up on and proceed from postmodern themes. The "question of postmodernism" that my dissertation title raises comes from Ihab Hassan's article in the 1980 issue of the Bucknell Review. In what he facetiously calls "An Unprofessional Note," Hassan elaborates an image of twentieth-century life that

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Natoli and Hutcheon make similar observations: "Postmodernity's assertion of the value of inclusive "both/and" thinking deliberately contests the exclusive "either/or" binary oppositions of modernity. Postmodern paradox, ambiguity, irony, indeterminacy, and contingency are seen to replace modern closure, unity, order, the absolute, and the rational" (ix). Their claim, however, that a set of open values "replaces" closed ones might be argued to participate in the "either/or" logic that the idea of the edge refuses to permit.

hauntingly evokes the human consequences (failures) of technology:

> We ask about postmodernism. But men die, women suffer, children starve in the dust, torturers heed no screams, technicians don their leather aprons, octogenarians reach for an empty cup, and physicists discover traces of the original moment of the universe. I suspect that these, and countless other events, are not entirely alien to the "question of postmodernism." . . . In some recoverable sense, no question we ask is innocent of pain and our mortality. ("The Question of Postmodernism" 122)

The "question of postmodernism" that Hassan makes us ask recasts Kroker and Cook's image of a "violent edge" "between fascination and lament" (Kroker 9). Human knowledge seems to be stalled in Hassan's vision, and this has explicit consequences for the body, its experiences, perceptions, and positioning within history and space. In the postmodern scene, "precisely because all other referents are now destabilized, the body referent, our own body, has emerged as a problem" (Lowe 14).

Echoing the concerns of Hassan, Fredric Jameson, in Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, writes that "the underside of culture is blood, torture,

death, terror" (5). Jameson provocatively expresses here what to him is "obvious," "namely, that this whole global, yet American, postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world" (5). Although I am not entirely convinced of the obviousness of his statement, I wish to capitalize on it nevertheless. Jameson makes two points that will be crucial to this dissertation, but I will reformulate them as questions rather than as statements of the "obvious." One, I will question to what extent the underside of culture is indeed "blood, torture, death, terror." Two, I will question to what extent postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of modes of production that find their most vital expression in America.

My readings substitute for Jameson's interest in specifically American military and economic domination an interest in the technologies of late capitalism. The term "technology" is used in its broadest sense. I wish to evoke on the one hand the Foucauldian concept of a system of

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[2] For an early exploration of this link, see Sergei Eisenstein, who writes "We know the inseparable link between the cinema and the industrial development of America. We know how production, art and literature reflect the capitalist breadth and construction of the United States of America. And we also know that American capitalism finds its sharpest and most expressive reflection in the American cinema" (196).

social control carried in "institutionalized discourses, epistemologies, critical practices, as well as practices of daily life" (de Lauretis 2). On the other hand, I refer quite literally to the mechanical technologies used to re/produce culture, from printing technologies to photographic and cinematic technologies. To understand the "something" that is "happening" in our cultural scene, it is necessary to examine the complex tensions between different material technologies, as well as the tensions between material technologies and cultural practices. Jeffrey Masten, Peter Stallybrass, and Nancy Vickers explain in their introduction to Language Machines that "material forms regulate and shape cultural practices . . . [and] new technologies do not just replace, but rather draw upon, absorb, displace, and resituate . . . earlier technologies" (6). An examination of material forms would not fall into an easy history where one form replaces another replaces another. The exchanges are multi-directional, and the shifts can be lateral. We do not yet know the consequences of these shifts in technologies of reproduction, but we are able to trace their outlines and navigate their edges.

Foucault articulates this concept of technology in The History of Sexuality, Volume 1. See especially Part Four, on the "Deployment of Sexuality," p 75-132.

V.

In 1993, in his report to the American Comparative Literature Association titled "Comparative Literature at the Turn of the Century," Charles Bernheimer recommended a broadening of our study of literary texts within a "complex, shifting, and often contradictory field of cultural production" (42). He also argued that

> The more traditional forms of interdisciplinary work such as comparisons between the sister arts should occur in the context of reflection on the privileged status of meaning making in each discipline, including its internal theoretical debates about the materiality of the medium it addresses. (43)

It should be clear to anyone attempting to consider film and literature in isolation or in conjunction that neither can be considered pure forms in themselves. "All media are mixed media," says W.J.T. Mitchell. "All representations are heterogenous; there are no 'purely'

Sergei Eisenstein was the first to suggest an "organic" relationship between the novel and the American film esthetic in his essay on "Dickens, Griffith and the Film Today" (195). More recently, Alan Spiegel, in Fiction and the Camera Eye has elaborated on this logical connection and argued that the relationship between modern literature and film extends well before the birth of the technology of the cinema to the proto-cinematic, visual styles of writers like Flaubert and Joyce.

visual or verbal arts" (Picture Theory 5). The "impulse to purify media," Mitchell claims, is "one of the central utopian gestures of modernism" (5). Nevertheless, this utopian and modernist gesture still pervades the way postmodernism is approached. Marshall McLuhan's invitation to analyze the relationships between all media, from the lightbulb and the wheel to the book to the photograph to the cybernetic system notwithstanding, of the many writers on Canadian postmodern cultural production, Linda Hutcheon stands out as one of very few who delve into interarts or intermedia considerations at all. While she does address film in her work on postmodern politics and poetics, Hutcheon concentrates especially on the visual arts and architecture. Literature and film are the focus of remarkably few works in Canadian studies.

Even fewer in Canada have looked explicitly at the relationship between technologies of film and writing in the contemporary postmodern scene. Those who approach film and literature tend to dwell on the question of adaptation at the expense of other lines of enquiry. The fact that postmodern culture does tend to reveal a confusion of forms and a blurring of textual, generic, and media boundaries has been observed often in the context of postmodernist theories of culture but not explained in terms of the material possibilities of cultural expression.

To explain the close relations between "new arts," most Canadian critics have relied explicitly on Lyotard-derived definitions of postmodern culture as a culture characterized by "a new legitimation. . . which recognizes the heteromorphology of language games" (Paterson 24). Within these models, the metafictional techniques that so many postmodern texts have in common frequently become the object of much attention because they provide evidence of a rupture and disruption in systems of knowledge about reality and fiction. Janet Paterson explains this:

> In the *énoncé*, two thematic fields characterize postmodern writing. The postmodern novel, marked in the discourse by the accumulation of self-reflexive processes, including the *mise en abyme*, the scriptural metaphor, and reduplications, relentlessly speaks of writing, reading, criticism, and, more generally art. . . . The postmodern novel is also characterized by rupture. . . [which] opposes notions of order and harmony.

See Jonathan Hart and Richard W. Bauman's introduction to Explorations in Difference for an account of Lyotard's impact on postmodern thought, p.3-20.

For discussions of metafictional strategies in postmodern culture outside of the Canadian context, see the essays edited by Douwe Fokkema and Hans Bertens in International Postmodernism and Approaching Postmodernism. See also Patricia Waugh, Metafiction.

> . . . more to expose the imperialism which defends and neutralizes other representational modes than to modify the systems of representation. (Postmodernism 21)

Certainly, the representation of another mode of representation within a text, such as the representation of practices of film making within a written text, and the converse, the representation of practices or writing within a film, draws attention to the constructed nature of texts in general. Yet I argue that the relationship between film and literature in the postmodern scene is relevant far beyond its metafictional function as an index of self-reflexive language games or of the imperialism of representational modes. Rather, the relationship between these systems of representation provides an index of the economy of signs in the postmodern scene resulting from the shifts and transitions between mechanical, electrical (and more recently digital) modes of production and reproduction. These shifts and transitions raise most pertinent epistemological, ontological and ethical questions.

VI.

Roland Barthes asks rhetorically in The Pleasure of the Text "does the text have human form, is it a figure, an anagram of the body?" (17). Barthes playfully points here

to an age-old, productive and yet slippery relationship between the human body and the text. In antiquity, the analogy between body and text was used to promote an aesthetic based on unity and harmony. For instance, Longinus, in "On the Sublime," suggests how language can have human form:

> Language is made grand in the highest degree by that which corresponds to the collocation of limbs in the body, of which no one, if cut off from another, has anything noticeable in itself, yet all in combination produce a perfect structure. So great passages, when separate and scattered in different parts, scatter also the sublimity; but if they are formed by partnership into a body, and also enclosed by the bond of rhythm, the limits which encircle them give them new voice; one might put it that grand effects within a period contribute to a common fund of grandeur. (89)

Horace's epistle "The Art of Poetry" begins with a similar analogy between unity of text and unity of body, but he brings in another art besides writing. Comparing painting to writing, Horace's monstrous hybrid is intended to be laughable and horrifying:

> Suppose a painter chose to couple a horse's neck with a human head, and to lay feathers of every

> hue on limbs gathered here and there, lovely above, foully ended in an ugly fish below; would you restrain your laughter, my friends, if admitted to a private view? Believe me, dear Pisos, a book will appear uncommonly like that picture, if impossible figures are wrought into it — like a sick man's dreams — with the result that neither head nor foot is ascribed to a single shape, and unity is lost. (128)

The ideal body that serves as the model for the ideal text, is a healthy, intact, symmetrical, static body. This body is the object of the steady gaze of anatomists and physiologists alike, and is controlled, not controlling. It is not at all like Horace's monstrously hybrid body, the product of a sick man's dreams, which shocks and disrupts because it reveals to the viewer its own raw, violent edges.

In contrast, Barthes' ideal body, as he explains, is not the body of anatomists or physiologists, that is, the body that science sees or discusses. Rather, it is a "body of bliss consisting solely of erotic relations, utterly distinct from the first body" (16). Crossed with libidinal energies and desires that always exceed will or reason, Barthes' body, like his text, is uncertain, extreme, precocious, seductive, and monstrous. Barthes' monstrous body of pleasure is congruent with the aesthetics of

fragmentation that are invested in current approaches to the relationship between body and text. Whether considering aesthetics of unity, knowledge and its relation to power, the formation of the subject, the labour of cultural production, or the workings of late capitalism and consumer culture, investigations into the monstrous body of bliss offer a welcome counter-narrative to a cerebral and detached philosophy.

Yet I stress that all these theories of the body are slippery, for to think or speak of the body is already to move away from it. Robert Kroetsch expresses this confusion elegantly: "The voice of the body. There is no voice of the body, only the voice of the body. That isn't what I mean" (19). Indeed, it is difficult to express what one means with regards to the body; discourses on the body tend often to be self-defeating, falling back onto Cartesian binaries such as nature/culture, body/mind, matter/thought, which construct hierarchies closed to the excesses and contradictions of Barthes' body of bliss or the mysteries and mutabilities of our material bodies. It is also difficult to speak of the body *in representation*.

Jean-Luc Nancy proposes the production of what he terms a *corpus* as an alternative to producing a *discourse* about the body:

> We need a *corpus*, a *catalog*, the recitation of an empirical logos that, without transcendental reason, would be a gleaned list, random in its order or in its degree of completion, a corpus of the body's *entries*: dictionary entries, entries into language, body registers, registers of bodies . . . . We need to recite, to blazon, body after body, place after place, entry by entry. (17)

"We need a corpus," Nancy continues,

> a simple nomenclature of bodies, of the places of the body, of its entry ways, a recitation enunciated from nowhere, and not even enunciated, but announced, recorded, and repeated, as if one said: foot, belly, mouth, nail, wound, beating, sperm, breast, tattoo, eating, nerve, touching, knee, fatigue . . . . (18)

This utopian catalogue, which through its associative randomness and its idealistic and fanciful sidestepping of an authoritative speaking or reciting subject avoids the *telos* and logic of Cartesian schism, is however posited from the outset as a failure. In fact, Nancy elaborates, "a double failure is given: a failure to produce a discourse on the body, also the failure not to produce a discourse on it" (18). Like Kroetsch, Nancy finds himself in a "double bind,

a psychosis":

> I have finished talking about the body, and I have not yet begun. I will never stop talking about it, and this body from which I speak will never be able to speak, neither about itself nor about me. . . . How can one get hold of the body? I am already speechless. (18)

Despite the possible silences the subject provokes, the texts I deal with here themselves speak the body loudly; they enunciate, announce, record, and repeat the body, its places and its entry ways; they produce and reproduce the body through words and images. The text in this corpus is a function of the body, a bodily function. This is not to attribute an organicity or naturalness where none exists. McLuhan shows how all media, all technologies of reproduction, are prosthetic – "extensions of ourselves, of bodies" (55). In the texts I read here, the trope of the body is used to represent the media technology; body and machine are entangled, and coupled. Each produces and reproduces the other.

VII.

My subsequent chapters are organized to follow a transformation in the way tropes of the body are used in strategies of auto-representation. Chapter Two examines the

body recycled. My reading of Jean-Claude Lauzon's Léolo in this chapter examines how the excreting and excremental body figures a model of cultural production based on the recycling of past forms. The image that structures and describes my analysis is that of "repeating machines." Roland Barthes uses this term to describe all institutions of language; however, in Lauzon's film about a young writer, the image also accurately describes the body of the writing subject who plagiarizes other texts for autobiographical purposes (Pleasure 40). The economy of production and reproduction in this film is conservative in its circularity, and yet its excrementality, its "sublime strategy of ingestion, ironic blockage, and final release" makes it participate in radical excesses (Dainotto 35). Lauzon operates on the edge of the carnivalesque. Despite the grotesque realism of all acts of creation represented in this film, despite the fact that the individual creative body – grandiose and exaggerated – is presented in intimate relationship with the ancestral body of the people, there is something of a "terrible vacuum, a nothingness" lurking behind the regenerating and renewing elements (Bakhtin 40). The film's concluding image of the silent, submerged, catatonic body of the author-protagonist who has become mad like the rest of his family reveals the ambivalence at the heart of this creative economy.

Chapter Three examines the body stamped out. This chapter takes a closer look at a range of practices of repetition and reproduction brought together in a single violent strategy of expression. The idea of "seriality" explains at once the technologies of reproduction that these texts hybridize and explode, and the en-gendering of body violence that ensues in the power field because of these technologies. The relationship between serial culture and the representation of body violence becomes the focus of my reading of two texts, David Fincher's film Seven and Hubert Aquin's Trou de mémoire. The crisis in the role and function of the author/artist announced by Lauzon is blatantly manifested in the scenes of these two works. A proliferation of competing media technologies has made it difficult for authors and artists to speak, write, or film and still be heard. As a consequence of this difficulty, the artist-figures in both texts turn to a vital textual arena – the human body – to convey their messages of condemnation and despair. They both rely on techniques borrowed from mechanical reproduction, and I elaborate on two analogous serial methods – the stamp and the sledgehammer. Artistic creation, in this economy, requires violent labours that fragment and destroy in order to produce that thus mirror the productive sterility, or sterile productivity, required of every subject in the age

of mechanical, electric and digital reproduction. The body, serially produced and serially destroyed through self-reflexive processes, can from one perspective be dismissed as mere residue, secondary to the value of its circulation as a sign in a crime scene. However, much like the anamorphically distorted cranium in Holbein's painting, The Ambassadors, visible and central, and yet distorted so as to be almost unrecognizable from most perspectives, the sign of the dead body in Fincher's and Aquin's work demands a cautiously dual optic and reading strategy that can consider how the violent practices and politics are embedded in very cultural materials that represent them.

Chapter Four examines the body de/composed. Through a close examination of specific rhetorical strategies which reveal the place where the death of language and the death of the body is glimpsed, this chapter reveals the edges of culture at sites of loss. The body in Hubert Aquin's novel about a murderous filmmaker, Neige Noire, is in a freeze-frame. Trapped *en abyme* in multiple levels of representation, watched, performed, televised, filmed and finally written about, its economy is not excremental, but rather circularly ambivalent. The highest function of signs in this text is to make the reality of the body disappear, and at the same time mask this disappearance. The image

that structures and guides my reading in this chapter comes from Kroker and Cook's comments on the "continent of simulated experience" in postmodernity: "Here there is no paradise of rotting flesh. . ." (Kroker and Cook 74). In the text, the assaulted, scarred, cannibalized, raped, and finally murdered body of the narrator/filmmaker's wife Sylvie, discarded in the snows of Norway, represents the perfect crime of representation. The frozen murdered body cannot decompose – it remains the body of evidence, inscribing clearly the instances of its own unmaking – and yet the same blanket or blankness of snow that preserves it beyond all mutability, also masks its disappearance. A network of intertextual references to film, theatre, and writing emphasize that Sylvie's tortures, death, and final resting, are metaphors for specific technologies of reproduction and their interrelationships within hybrid texts. However, the continuous history of modernity traced by these intertexts reveals that when the cutting edge hits the limits of representation, it also creates an impasse that has epistemological and phenomenological effects on the auto-cannibalistic consumer of the text. Suspended between bliss and annihilation, the creating and reading subject might well possess the dual optic demanded by the text, but remains incapable of any form of action or agency beyond disappearance.

Chapter Five examines the body displaced and replaced. Reading Atom Egoyan's short film Calendar in light of the themes of crime-narrative explored in other chapters, this final analysis relies on an observation from Jean Baudrillard that "Images have become our true sex object, the object of our desires" (Ecstasy 53). Once again, a body has gone missing – the wife of the photographer-protagonist of the film. Over a full calendar year, from his home in Toronto, the photographer puts together the scenes of his betrayal. He relentlessly pours over fleeting images of her in the video tapes that documented their journey to Armenia, and he repeats the scene of her leaving through highly scripted performances, acted out with hired escorts who uncannily resemble the body of his loved one. The evidence seems to suggest that the crime in this highly elegiac film has to do with technologies of reproduction. Communication is overly mediated by competing media, and there is a short-circuit between receiver and sender; physical touch and intimacy is sacrificed for the flat surface of the image and its promiscuous reproduction. The absent wife has left messages on an answering machine begging for a letter of some sort that might penetrate beyond this flat surface. Underlying her request is the belief that the earlier technology of writing conveys more feeling than images, and is more "touching" and can thus compensate for the tactility

the photographic and video image obliterates. For the photographer, however, the scene of writing is already inscribed with loss and with distance. His epistle thus maps out the spaces of simulation, where touch and mediation, reproduction and video, audio recording, photography, and scripted performance all coincide.

Chapter Six serves as a brief conclusion that suggests some of the epistemological and ethical questions the reading of these texts raises, and articulates the monstrous stakes of the explosive crossings and confrontations of media in hybrid texts.

> **And what, then, of the place of art. . . in the post-modern scene? Signs of detritus, wreckage and refuse which, moving at the edge of fascination and despair, signal. . . the triumph of excremental culture? (Kroker and Cook 7)**

Chapter Two

The Body Recycled

"Repeating Machines" in Jean-Claude Lauzon's *Léolo*

> **Vous trouvez nos plaisirs uniformes, dîtes plutôt qu'ils sont souvent répétés. (La Dixmerie 23)**

Jean-Claude Lauzon's Léolo is a film about books and writing. The young protagonist of this passionate and disturbing film, Léo Lozeau, seeks to be an author, and in classic *künstlerroman* style, the film depicts a portrait-of-the-artist-as-a-young-man. "Le dompteur avait raison," Léo remarks, referring to his literary mentor, described throughout the film as the "dompteur des mots," or word-tamer in the English version, "il y avait un secret dans les mots mis bout-à-bout." The secret pleasures of writing are as visceral for the young Léo as the secret pleasures of masturbating, and indeed sexuality and textuality are indissociable in this film. Seated with book in hand on the back of Fernand, his body-building brother, to provide extra weight for Fernand's push-ups, moving up and down in a comical but sterile mimicry of the rhythm of intercourse, Léo quips: "C'est ainsi que j'ai commencé à prendre plaisir

à la lecture."

Léo discovers the "secret" powers of the written word almost by chance through one particular text -- a copy of Réjean Ducharme's L'Avalée des avalés found in his otherwise illiterate household. Léo explicitly associates this text with the origins of his desires to become a writer:

> C'était le seul livre de la maison. Je ne me suis jamais demandé comment il est arrivé là. Il était épais, les mots serrés les uns sur les autres, demandant beaucoup d'effort de concentration pour livrer leur secret. À la maison, je n'ai jamais vu personne lire ou écrire. La télé et les panneaux publicitaires occupaient mon esprit. Au début, j'en lisais les passages soulignés sans trop comprendre. Je me souviens d'avoir voulu abandonner parce qu'il n'y avait pas d'images.

Léo's nascent and developing textuality emerges from a cultural environment where television and advertising image has marginalized the written and read word. In this context, his choice of written text over any other medium of self-expression is highly relevant.

The film meticulously inscribes a tension between the different technologies of reproduction. The colourful kinetic sequences of the film are repeatedly punctuated with static images of Léo reading and writing, and with close-up

inserts of the black on white texts he reads and writes. Furthermore, images of the word-tamer distributing and collecting fragments of writing, images of the library where the many written texts of the film are gathered, and throughout the entire film, a voice-over technique which permits three voices – young Léo, the word-tamer, and the narrator who may or may not be an older Léo reminiscing about his past – to read aloud the written texts, multiply the filmic signifiers of "writing." Image and word, cinematic signifier and written textual signifier, appear to vie for control of the narrative in a battle mediated by soundtrack and voice.

Lauzon's proliferation of technologies of reproduction within his filming of a *künstlerroman* narrative at one level satisfies the demands of postmodern self-reflexivity. Within the confines of this reading, it could be argued that Lauzon uses film form with typically postmodern irony in order to recall nostalgically the lost purity of the literary written word to a world contaminated by art forms more evidently indebted to mechanical reproduction. But to recall Marshall McLuhan's argument that "The crossings or hybridizations of the media release great new force and

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On irony see Linda Hutcheon, Irony's Edge: the Theory and Politics of Irony, "Power of Postmodern Irony," as well as Mark Cheetham, Essays in Canadian Irony, and the Afterword in Jonathan Hart, Theatre and World.

energy. . ." demands that the co-presence and crossing of film image, written text, and spoken soundtrack in this film be examined in greater detail with an eye for their explosive potential (Understanding Media 48). If, as McLuhan suggests, technology is always an extension of ourselves, of our bodies, the thematic linking of sex and text in Léolo has much to say about how cultural economies figure and configure technologies of reproduction.

Critical Remarks

Critics and reviewers to date have not explored in depth the paradoxes of the film's textuality. Their comments, nevertheless, help to articulate more precisely what is at stake in Lauzon's film. While there have been several glowing reviews of the film which was warmly received at Cannes in 1992, the negative reviews are more useful to this analysis because of the details of their arguments. In brief, Léolo has been attacked for being unoriginal in subject matter, derivative in style, aesthetically kitschy, tedious in pace, repetitive in structure, and disgusting in content.

Johanne Larue, for instance, condemns the film's lack of originality, describing it as an inferior copy of original art-house films: "Léolo n'est original qu'en apparence," she observes. "Il n'y a rien dans cette oeuvre,

pourtant personnelle, qui n'a déjà été fait, et mieux fait, dans Amarcord, Le Tambour, Cris et Chuchotements, Les Ailes du désir, Night of the Hunter, et The Reflecting Skin" (53). To this list of cinematic fathers other critics have added Pixote, 400 Coups, Toto le héros, and many have pointed out that the masturbation episode is stolen from Philip Roth's novel Portnoy's Complaint. Lauzon's film is highly indebted to these and other works, and many of his images, themes, storylines, and approaches originate elsewhere.

If the entire film has been condemned for its lack of originality, the "writing" in the film has been criticized for similar reasons. André Roy and Johanne Larue both focus in particular on Léo's "poetry." For Roy, the young protagonist's poetry, which weaves together the pieces of the film and is responsible for creating its dream-like quality, lacks authenticity and truth. "Si tout est rêve," he writes, "tout devrait être poésie. Lauzon s'efforce . . . d'atteindre un degré poétique élevé qui a, malheureusement, plus d'affinités avec l'art kitsch et pompier qu'avec la poésie naturelle et vraie" (16). According to Roy, then, Léo's poetry is a copy, and worse yet, a copy of the wrong kind of original; to his detriment, Lauzon's Léo turns (perhaps inadvertently) to kitsch rather than to high literature for his model and as a consequence, his writing moves too far away from the aura of original, authentic,

natural, and true art. Roy brings up Lauzon's background in advertising, and uses the director's experience with commercial forms to conclude that Léolo as a whole is "victime de l'esthétique pub" (16).[1] According to Roy, advertising, unlike natural and true poetry and unlike real cinema, "ne livre pas de vision du monde, mais comptabilise le monde comme une marchandise" (16). Clearly, for Roy, advertising is a condemnable and debased cultural practice, and a high-art form which mimics its commercializing tendencies is doubly condemnable.

Larue's critique of the poetry in Léolo is more formalist than Roy's ideological-aesthetic[2] critique. She focuses on Lauzon's technique of repeating lines of verse:

> Il est tout à fait gênant d'entendre Sicotte répéter inlassablement le mantra du film, "Parce que moi je rêve, moi je ne le suis pas" comme s'il s'agissait d'un vers de Nelligan. La première fois, ça impressionne. On se dit qu'il s'agit d'un film profond. La dixième fois, on grince des dents et on comprend que le film est creux. Tout

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[1] Lauzon claimed a preference for advertising over cinema: "Movies aren't my passion. I prefer shooting TV commercials. They're fast and painless" (Brownstein E8).

[2] For a summary of contemporary theorists of ideology from Frye and Barthes to Jameson and Eagleton, see Jonathan Hart, Northrop Frye, 191-242.

cet écho. . . .(53)

Larue further complains that film's narrative technique wherein a voice-over narrator (Gilbert Sicotte) explains the images and frequently repeats verbatim the words of the young Léolo (Maxime Colin) is a technique of exhaustion that drains the film of the impact of its content, and renders it emotionally sterile:

> Une voix omniprésente, omnipotente et omnisciente. . . souligne chaque réplique, chaque moment de douleur jusqu'à épuiser le contenu de la pellicule et la rendre stérile de toute émotion. (53)

Like Roy, Larue's critique proceeds according to a very rigorous imperative against contamination of cultural forms. High art is not low art, both seem to be saying, and where high art and poetry inspires, low art, advertising, kitsch, and other productions of unoriginality debase, contaminate, and (not paradoxically) sterilize.

Francine Pelletier is far less subtle than either Roy or Larue in her attack of Léolo; she simply finds the film reprehensibly disgusting.[1] Good cinema seeks to enlighten the viewer, and advertising may seek to titillate the viewer, but Lauzon's film, she argues, intends only to shock

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[1] For a variety of perspectives on the question of disgust in literature and culture, see Robert Wilson's Disgust Issue of Mattoid.

and disgust. Pelletier condemns Lauzon for his

> penchant pour le scandale et le spectaculaire, ce besoin de fourrer le nez des spectateurs dans un gros tas de merde, et de lui écraser les narines bien comme il le faut. On sent que le réalisateur ne sait plus quoi faire pour nous choquer. (B3)

Without question, the film is disturbing. From the father's ongoing obsession with bowel movements and frequent inspections of his family's faeces, to the "dirty" sex acts the grandfather performs with the barely pubescent angelic prostitute neighbour girl Bianca whom he asks over and over to bite off his filthy toenails, to Léo's masturbatory use of the raw liver later cooked and eaten at the family dinner, to the Gaudin boy's sickening rape of a cat cheered on by a group of boys, the film repeatedly casts its unflinching gaze on unpleasant, dark, and outright disturbing practices.

The values of authenticity, originality, truth, and beauty that inform these criticisms are at odds with a reading of the film that stresses post-modern self-reflexivity, and they do not explode, or even illuminate the function of technologies of writing in the film, nor do they say anything about the way text relates back to the body. Nevertheless, by raising questions about origins and originality, representation and repetition, and violence and

violation, these comments do point out crucial aspects of Lauzon's film that my reading here seeks to address. This chapter seeks to read the film's often shocking body-violence, its displaced sexualities, its images of excrement and garbage, its highly repetitive style and structure, its use of clichéd images and commonplace forms, its acknowledged and unacknowledged "borrowings" from literary and cinematic sources, and its aesthetic contaminated by advertising, as contributing to a lucid commentary on the economies of representation in a postmodern age. Lauzon's Léolo has been a neglected text in Canadian and international discourses on postmodernity, and yet, I argue, it powerfully articulates many of their core issues.

Author Functions

> **It is obviously insufficient to repeat empty slogans: the author has disappeared. . . . (Foucault, "What is an Author?" 121)**

Léolo is a film about writing, written by the director, a portrait-of-an-artist-as-a-young-man set in the very house in the Mile End neighbourhood in Montréal where Jean-Claude Lauzon was born. As a consequence, Léolo has often been interpreted as "cinematic autobiography" (Scott C8).

This reading, resorting to predictable comparisons between Léolo and Lauzon which set the director up as "l'enfant terrible" of Québec cinema, also paradoxically fails to recognize genre, and neglects Léolo's origins in *künstlerroman* fiction and film.

Certainly, the patronymic and anagrammatic play encouraged by the names of the creator and his creation, (Jean-Claude) Lauzon-Léo Lozeau-Léolo Lozone, permits a reading which argues that Lauzon is, or perhaps was, Léo Lozeau.

The alliterative repetition of phonemes in this naming, typical of the economy of repetition that governs every level of the film, disrupts what Michel Foucault has termed the "author-function" ("What is an Author" 123). Foucault argues that, unlike a proper name which moves from the interior of a discourse to the real person outside who produced it, an author's name marks off "the contours of texts – separating one from the other, defining their form, and characterizing their mode of existence" (123). Neither the textual scribblings shown nor the voice-over narration spoken in Léolo can be clearly attributed to an "author's" name. To figure out whether they belong to Léo Lozeau, Léolo Lozone, or to the voice-over narrator who may be Lozeau but also may be Lauzon, becomes a playful exercise in futility: the phonemes repeat and change and the names themselves blur. Léolo makes it very difficult to tell who is speaking: author/director, young character, young character's alter-ego/pseudonym, or character grown up to be

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Lucien Dällenbach, in The Mirror in the Text, suggests that one of the core characteristics which signals mise-en-abyme and reflexivity is "virtual homonymy between a character and the author" (46).

author/creator.

This ambiguity surrounding authorship and the authority of a speaking voice in Léolo is symptomatic of the epistemic shift that Foucault's essay "What is an Author" sets out to address. To express the transformation of the "author-function" in "the writing of our day" (116) which has resulted in the famous "death of the author" (117), Foucault turns twice to a wonderfully repetitive quotation from Samuel Beckett: "What matter who's speaking, someone said, what matter who's speaking" (115). Foucault recognizes in Beckett's "murmur of indifference" (138) one of the fundamental ethical principles of contemporary writing. The question, attributed to a nameless speaker, indicates a new economy of signs where the focus has shifted from product to process:

> . . . the essential basis of this writing is not the exalted emotions related to the act of composition or the insertion of a subject into language. Rather, it is primarily concerned with creating an opening where the writing subject endlessly disappears. (116)

The critics of Léolo I have cited above, and in particular Roy and Larue, are dissatisfied with the film because they expect from its writing and from the writing within it the "exalted emotions" Foucault describes. The film offers

instead a game of mirrors that exalts in the multiplication of author-figures and the disappearance of the single, functionally authoritative "author."

If Foucault observes and analyzes the changes in the "author-function," Roland Barthes in S/Z playfully celebrates them. Barthes' authors are almost entirely divested of authority over their texts; *écriture* exceeds the will, reason, and power of the writing subject. Looking at Flaubert's writings, Barthes remarks for instance, "*one never knows if he is responsible for what he writes* (if there is a subject *behind* his language)" (140). To accept Barthes' dismissal of authorial authority makes it quite impossible to read a text for the "exalted emotions related to the act of composition" since the subject might not intend what he says (Foucault, "What is an Author" 116). Echoing Foucault (and Beckett), Barthes claims that "the very being of writing (the meaning of the labour that constitutes it) is to keep the question *Who is speaking?* from ever being answered" (Barthes, S/Z 140).

Foucault and Barthes historicize and contextualize the seeming paradox of an autobiographical *künstlerroman* where the identity of the speaking/writing subject is continually vexed. They are both, however, interested in writing as such. Consequently, when the medium of film is introduced

into the equation, so that authors are also directors and actors, and speaking subjects actually speak, Foucault and Barthes need to be taken a step further. Mary Ann Doane, in her article "The Voice in the Cinema," provides this extra step. Doane addresses the specifically cinematic technique of voice-over, and her comments shed light on the way Lauzon mobilizes this technique borrowed from National Film Board documentary practice. "There is always something uncanny about a voice which emanates from a source outside the frame" (40), she remarks, and, echoing Beckett, Foucault, and Barthes, Doane observes that the voice-over technique in the cinema "censors the questions 'Who is speaking?,' 'Where?,' 'In what time?,' and 'For whom?'" (42). In effect, Doane argues that the voice-over technique performs disjunctions that are very similar to the disjunctions in "author-function" that Foucault details.

In traditional documentary practice, voice-over commentary produces a "*disembodied* voice" which by virtue of its disembodiedness speaks with authority:

> It is precisely because the voice is not localizable, because it cannot be yoked to a body, that it is capable of interpreting the image, producing its truth. . . . The guarantee of knowledge, in such a system, lies in its

> irreducibility to the spatio-temporal limitations of the body. (Doane 42)

In the history of the documentary, this voice, Doane observes, "has been for the most part that of the male, and its power resides in the possession of knowledge and in the privileged, unquestioned activity of interpretation" (42). In other words, she recognizes that the voice-over narrator, like Foucault's author, possesses authority over the circulation and interpretation of discourses within society, and this authority is very much vested with the politics and erotics of power.

Léolo is not a documentary film, and the nameless, disembodied voice-over narrator, although male, although uncannily emanating from beyond the frame, speaks in first-person. The knowledge of this voice is subjective, and its "privileged," "unquestioned" activities of interpretation seem at all times split. On the one hand, the voice of the voice-over directs its knowledge self-referentially back to itself, interpreting its own status as speaking subject. On the other hand, the voice-over censors the question "who is speaking" by directing its powers of interpretation towards the actors on screen. This scission of voice and body, voice and speaking-subject, voice and object of speech, effected by the narrative techniques of soundtrack editing in this film underlines the strategies of fragmentation and

multiplication that the name game (Léo-Lozeau, Léolo Lozone, Jean-Claude Lauzon) sets into play.

Passions and Anxieties of Origins

> ***To write is to have the passion of the origin.* (Derrida 295)**

What does it matter who is speaking? The question prompts a process of reading the writing of the film which takes the concept of "cinematic autobiography" beyond the very literal equation of author with text. Whether or not and to what extent the film reflects its director's life is an ultimately unproductive question: Lauzon-Lozeau-Lozone-lé-lo-la-la-lo-lo. . . Nevertheless, the elements (and problems) of autobiography evoked by the film's playing with names, by its narrative technique, and by its deployment of classic *künstlerroman* topoi, cannot be set aside. These elements participate in a generic practice that self-consciously brings the problem of writing or creating to the fore. The film continually multiplies and mirrors the signifiers of "author" or "creator" at the same time as it confounds any singular identification of person with

function.

The critics who decry the lack of originality of this film are right; the tropes of writing and "authorship" in Léolo are unoriginal, clichéd, and stereotyped.[12] An analogy between the creative labours of the two brothers proves useful on this point. Fernand, Léo's brother, assumes the role of "strong-man" when he begins to work his body, just as Léo assumes the role of "writer" or "author" when he begins to work with texts. Léo's role as creator of

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Janet Paterson observes that the *mise en scène* of an author as a character emerges from such a long literary tradition that it is the most obvious place to look for evidence of typically postmodern autorepresentation (27). She cites André Belleau in Le romancier fictif, who further contends: "Le roman qui met en scène un écrivain accomplit une réitération et même un dédoublement de l'auteur, de l'écriture et d'une idée de la littérature. . . . Le personnage-écrivain . . . met en cause le récit comme discours littéraire: par lui, la littérature parle d'elle-même, le discours s'auto-réfère" (Belleau 22-3, Paterson 27).

Mirelle Rosello makes a highly relevant point that the very word and concept of "stereotype" evolved out of the technical developments of printing (21). Its functioning as a metaphor, linked to a concrete practice of mechanical textual reproduction, is, she argues, marked by a principle of ambivalence: "The stereotype facilitates the transmission of ideas, images, and concepts, but it does so by freezing a certain stage of production of the text. . . . both literally and metaphorically, the stereotype is systematically implicated in the issue of repetition that has long confounded thinkers who have tried to adjudicate the relative value of originals and copies" (23). Rosello suggests, moreover, that the stereotype is analogous to the distinction between images and texts, or visual and written narratives: "stereotyping process turns the text into an image. . ." (23).

texts has a different cultural valence than Fernand's role as sculptor of his own body, but it is just as culturally pre-determined and socially circumscribed, as Foucault has demonstrated. Both roles have been already scripted in the texts that they consume. Fernand clearly acts out the "Charles Atlas" narrative from the ads in comic books. In contrast, Léo's continual scribbling is derivative of higher cultural texts, perhaps of Proust or Rousseau. Nevertheless, it is clear that both cultural practices, body building and autobiographical writing, are labours involving the fashioning of a self after models dictated in other textual forms. Bodybuilding and text building, low art and high art, are creative acts that are revealed in the film to be unoriginal, stereotyped, frozen.

To conceive of the autobiographical elements in Léolo in terms of a generic practice thus permits a sidestepping of the problems surrounding authorship and authorial authority: the practice of "life-writing," as genre, dictates the reactivation and deployment of certain typologies which are by definition repetitive and unoriginal. If Fernand's and Léo's roles differ at all, they do so in that, unlike the comic book advertising

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For an account of the genre of "life writing" see, for example, Marlene Kadar, Essays on Life Writing: from Genre to Critical Practice.

"strong man" narrative, the narrative of "precocious-young-boy-becomes-author" connotes creativity, authenticity, and originality. These connotations serve to mask the fact that the story and its tropes are long clichéd.

As with all autobiographical writing, the autobiographical elements in the film betray a profound anxiety about origins. The opening shot of the film establishes the action geographically in space, as well as politically and culturally. As the camera pans down the building where Jean-Claude Lauzon was actually born to focus on the young Léo playing with his toy gun, the adult voice-over narrator explains: "Ca, c'est chez moi, dans le quartier du Mile End, Montréal, Canada." This is emblematic of the disruption of the "author-function" in the film. "Chez moi," the house which once belonged to Lauzon, is shown to be inhabited by Léo Lozeau, and is claimed to be possessed by the adult voice-over narrator. The narrator's

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Daniel Castillo Durante explains this further. In Du stéréotype à la littérature he argues that the function of the cliché—which he categorizes as a borrowed unit ("unité d'emprunt")—is to be offered up *as presence* by discourse (16). As sign, the cliché appears to be pure, but it is in fact a repetition, borrowed from elsewhere. As a result, the economy of the stereotype is "une économie *masquée*" (16). The hidden quality of this economy of signs, he continues, plays a particular role: "elle fournit au stéréotype l'anonymat moyennant lequel il demeure insaisissable" (16, my emphasis). In other words, stereotypes are not perceived or recognized as stereotypes because their economy is masked and anonymous.

self-positioning in terms of neighbourhood, city, and nation recalls Stephen Dedalus' self-positioning in James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. Dedalus' position is precise, and his contextualizing of his position expansive, even excessive:

> *Stephen Dedalus*
>
> *Class of elements*
>
> *Clongowes Wood College*
>
> *Sallins*
>
> *County Kildare*
>
> *Ireland*
>
> *Europe*
>
> *The World*
>
> *The Universe* (15).

Dedalus' act of writing "himself, his name and where he was" relates fundamentally to his discovery of the powers of language (15). In contrast, in Léolo, the narrator's articulation of his position in the world is characterized by its brevity, and in particular, by its omissions. The province of Québec is missing from the narrator's list; if Dedalus' geographic space opens onto the infinity of the

universe, the space in Léolo is fractured and limited.

The narrator in Léolo proceeds to position himself within culture through a rhetorical strategy of negation that is repeated throughout the film. "Tout le monde croit que je suis un Canadien-Français," he observes, "Parce que moi je rêve, moi, je ne le suis pas. Parce que moi je rêve, moi, je ne le suis pas." His identification of his origins in culture, like his origins in place, is noteworthy in its failure to name Québec, a fact I will turn to later. The narrator's lines, "parce que moi, je rêve, moi, je ne le suis pas," said twice every time they are enunciated, and repeated *ad nauseam* throughout the film, become a refrain of denial and negation that recasts the Cartesian dictum *cogito ergo ego sum*; "I think therefore I am" becomes "I dream therefore I am not." The rationality and intentionality of

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A similar strategy of address derivative of Joyce occurs in Alice Munro's Lives of Girls and Women. Del Jordan, another precocious artist-protagonist is asked to show her writing skills by practising with Uncle Benny's address. Excessive, she writes it out in full, beginning with his name, address, community, county, province, country, continent, hemisphere, world, solar system, and finally universe (9). E.D. Blodgett analyzes the metonymic qualitites of this address as they reveal "meaning as miracle" that can be "discovered only in the play of language" (39).

Descartes has no relevance in the space of this film ; certitude of thought and being are replaced by the contradictions of dreaming and not being.

In Joyce's *künstlerroman*, Cartesian thought is still feasible. For Stephen Dedalus, acts of naming relate to understanding and mastery:

> He tried to think what a big thought that must be but he could only think of God. God was God's name just as his name was Stephen. . . . But though there were different names for God in all the different languages in the world and God understood what all the people who prayed said in their different languages still God remained always the same God and God's real name was God. (16)

For the speaker in Lauzon's film, language is caught in a logical impasse. Each time the refrain is articulated, this dreamer names the very things that he insistently denies in his act of naming. As a consequence, his negatory speech acts assert the existence and relevance of what they

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On Descartes' importance "at the founding moment of the philosophical discourse of modernity" to the idea of the "disembodied cogito, with its absolute emphasis on the essentiality of thinkingness rather than corporeality," see Francis Barker, The Tremulous Private Body (vi). For a brief introduction to the relevance of visual prostheses to Descartes' thought, see also Paul Virilio, The Vision Machine (4).

disavow.

After denying Léo's origins in space (Québec) and culture (French-Canadian), the narrator's rhetoric of negation is next applied to his paternity. The film shows images of Léo's overweight father toiling in a factory while machines spin and turn in the background. The setting recalls Chaplin's Modern Times and Lang's Metropolis, and, as in these films, Léo's father's labour is shown to be dehumanizing, mechanical, repetitive. The voice-track narrates: "On dit de lui qu'il est mon père, mais moi je sais que je ne suis pas son fils, parce que cet homme est fou, et que moi, je ne le suis pas. Parce que moi, je rêve, moi, je ne le suis pas. Parce que moi, je rêve, moi je ne le suis pas."

Léo's dreams rewrite the script of his life to locate his origins, geographical, cultural, and paternal, so they are located in a postcard-pretty Italy. The father Léo dreams up for himself is pictured as a cliché of the healthy peasant labouring in fields as picturesque as a painting. Gazing at the plump breasts of a peasant woman as she works

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Léo's dreamed-father embodies the stereotypes of "italianicité" that Barthes identifies in his analysis of the advertising image in "Rhétorique de l'image": "l'*italianicité*," Barthes explains, "ce n'est pas l'Italie, c'est l'essence condensée de tout ce qui peut être italien, des spaghetti à la peinture" (49). Barthes evokes this neologism to reveal how systems of connotation belong to ideology.

around crates of ripe red tomatoes, the dream father masturbates. Not exactly a Casanova, this "Latin lover" is warned to stop his frenzied activity before he ruins the tomatoes, but he disregards the warning, ejaculating into the tomatoes which are destined anyhow for America. In Léo's fantasy, the tomatoes show up in an outdoor market in Montréal where Léo's corpulent mother is shopping. She tips over the cart of produce and falls into the tomatoes. The next scene shows her in at the doctor's, where he pulls out from her womb a decaying tomato that upon closer examination is shown to be crawling with very motile sperm.

Léo's humorous retelling of the "immaculate conception" narrative offers a creative variation of more literal autobiographical beginnings, but more importantly, this narrative plays with the concepts of creation and creator. By scripting his conception as a freak accident involving the collision of body with food, Léo in fact erases his real and his fantasy parents' reproductive powers. Indeed, sexual reproduction is consistently elided in this film. In the place of sexual reproduction, the film substitutes textual reproduction, and in the place of (inter)penetration, the film substitutes incorporation. Léolo the writer thus becomes a product (and thereby a symbol) of incorporation. His authorial identity as Léolo Lozone is thus born out of his powers to rework texts; he

becomes a product not of the bodies of his parents, but of his own discourse which merely recycles stories already written. In fact, once his parents' bodies are divested of their procreative powers, they become easily incorporated into his own productions: "Ma famille est devenue une fiction et j'en parlais comme des étrangers."[4]

I have suggested that Léolo functions according to a tension between image and word, between cinematic signifier and written textual signifier. This tension is perhaps most visible in the scene that presents Léo's dream-father. The Italian father to whom Léo attributes his paternity is shown on screen masturbating into the crate of tomatoes from two camera angles, one from the front and one from behind. The voice-over narrator explains: "Parce qu'il se tenait caché, je n'ai jamais vu le visage de mon vrai père." And indeed, the camera work ensures that this man's face is never revealed. The narrator's statement about the dream-father's visibility and Léo's ability to see and know him frames the dream-work in terms that reveal a tension between different

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[4] Anne Élaine Cliche, in Le Désir du roman, explains how the novel figures origins in terms of the body, and her comments apply to the novelist in this film: "Si le roman repose la question des origines, c'est sans doute parce qu'il parle du corps qui le produit non seulement comme sa substance causale - psychique ou biographique - mais comme le corps qui en est aussi l'effet. Un roman ne cesse jamais de dire que le corps procède de l'écriture et non l'inverse." (19).

modes of cultural re/production. Because the cinematic signifier is dependant on the relationship between the camera and real bodies in space where the written or verbal signifier is unimpeded by corporeality, Léo's dream-work appears in this instance to be filiated from the cinema more than from literature. Literary dream-work could easily imagine the face of this "real" father. Another variable is thus established in the classic *künstlerroman* narrative, and Léolo becomes possible now to read as a portrait-of-the-writer-as-a-young-filmmaker.

Creation and Filiation

> **Je n'écris pas, je suis écrit. . . . Les images que j'imprime sur ma rétine s'y trouvaient déjà. Je n'invente pas. (Aquin, Prochain épisode, 89-90)**

By dreaming a new father unintentionally responsible for his immaculate conception, Léo explodes the question of origins raised by autobiographical writing. Tracing his lineage outside of his family, outside his culture, and outside his country to a faceless, anonymous, and therefore unidentifiable Sicilian peasant, Léo's gesture echoes Beckett's "murmur of indifference" attributed simply to "someone" (Foucault, "What is an Author" 115). This does not mean that the filiation of the film as a whole does not matter; rather, Léo's gesture within the film opens up the possibilities of locating the film's origins as text beyond

the author, in other texts. Léolo is, as critics have observed, unoriginal. The derivation of its generic conventions, its imagery, its philosophical outlook, and its narrative episodes from other texts, whether acknowledged or unacknowledged, is another way the film vexes the authority of authorship and refuses to mark off the contours of the text. I wish to avoid a simple itinerary of the sources of Léolo, because the fact is that the film's origins are locatable in a vast array of literary, cinematic, journalistic, and painterly texts, and to attempt to list these is in this context an unproductive exercise. Of more interest is the way that some of these sources and/or intertexts can be brought into dialogue with Lauzon's film.

For instance, Réjean Ducharme's L'Avalée des avalés is very explicitly referred to and often cited in the film. Through repeated close-ups and inserts, Ducharme's text comes to function as a visual icon of literary texts in general. Its form as bound, published book, distinguishes it from the other fragmented hand-written texts shown in the film, and as a consequence, it represents writing as a discrete, uniformly repeatable, consumable product. The choice of Ducharme's novel as Léo's single most visible source-text is clearly not accidental. Besides its publication date (1966) which would have made it contemporary to the young Léo, L'avalée is very similar in

theme and in form to the film. Both texts are narrated in autobiographical style. Both texts have child narrators with gifts for language who become increasingly nihilistic and hostile as they grow up. Both texts are rooted in Québec but dream incessantly of elsewhere. These general parallels permit much more interesting analogies, however.

Ducharme's Bérénice Einberg understands the practice of writing texts to be particularly visceral, and she implicates the entire human body in its processes. She explains, "Lorsque, chez un être humain, l'angoisse atteint une certaine intensité, on assiste à une diarrhée de mots. On peut le remarquer en particulier chez le pornographe, appelé aussi écrivain, auteur, romancier et poète" (288). What she describes as a "diarrhea" of words (logorrhea) provoked by the pain of living is shared by "author" and "pornographer." In other words, producers of high and low culture alike share symptoms of excess. Reading this observation against the wealth of excremental imagery in Léolo permits a deeper understanding of how the body con/figures textual economies. The pen relates as much to the bowels as to the phallus; writing is as much about recycling of culture as reproducing culture. Within this rather visceral context, the play on swallowing in Ducharme's novel's punning title, like the images of eating in Léolo, cast strategies of incorporation (citation,

parody, pastiche and such) into this larger corporeal system.

Still on the subject of bodies, Léo's development as a writing subject obviously owes much to Rousseau's Confessions. Again, the pattern of precocious child-reader grown up to become writer that Lauzon copies can be clearly discerned in this analogy, as can the more delightful and less subtle pattern of representing the pleasures taken in writing about the body. As Peter Brooks remarks, Rousseau is "the first who recognizes his body as a problem in the determination of his own life story and sets himself the task of giving a narrative account of the problem" (27). Rousseau's confessional mode permits the representation of the unrepresentable, the speaking of the unspeakable, and his descriptions of his twisted sexuality are among the most lively passages in the entire work. Lauzon's film certainly exploits the full potentials of this confessional mode, and in this sense the pleasures of his film are very similar to the pleasures of Rousseau's text. The coupling of Léolo with the Confessions underlines, however, the fact that in both of these texts, the pleasures of the body are sought in ways entirely separate from heterosexual intercourse leading to reproduction. What appears to make spanking, masturbation, playing with food, feet, and animals, and other erotic activities pleasurable is precisely their

reproduction/representation in textual form. By separating the pleasures of the body from heterosexual reproduction, Rousseau and Lauzon both locate pleasure in textual re/production. Rousseau's "Avertissement," moreover, explicitly invokes the body of the reader: "Qui que vous soyez . . . je vous conjure par mes malheurs, par vos entrailles, et au nom de toute l'espèce humaine, de ne pas anéantir un ouvrage utile et unique" (2). Addressing the very entrails of the reader, Rousseau urges the full incorporation of his text against its obliteration and forgetting. Rousseau's explicit linking of lower body strata with processes of remembering and commemorating works around Cartesian dualism in the same way that Léolo's paradox of dreaming and not being does.

The specific episode in Léolo when our writer masturbates into the family dinner is of course pilfered from Philip Roth's 1967 novel Portnoy's Complaint. This novel dwells on excrement and ejaculation mostly as both relate to male impotence. Roth traces the physical symptoms of male loss of power that are caused by the verbal machinations of an overprotective woman. In Léolo, the males also suffer symptoms of impotence so deep that not even Fernand's bulked-up physique helps. The cause of their suffering, however, seems to be less attributable to their nurturing and nourishing mother than to their French-

Canadianness. Léo also differs from Alex Portnoy, who in his psychoanalytic narrative repeatedly denies the world of dreams:

> Dreams? If only they had been! But I don't need dreams, Doctor, that's why I hardly have them – because I have this life instead. With me it all happens in broad daylight! (Roth 257)

Léo's dreaming, his poetry, and his ultimate madness bring him closer to the author Émile Nélligan, who wrote his passionate poetry young, and spent the rest of his life in asylums, than to Roth's character Alex Portnoy. The analogy with Nélligan is, I find, most fascinating, because Nélligan's "real" story exposes some of the complexities of Foucault's "author-function." Nélligan's status and symbol as an "author" occurred as the writer's incarcerated body could no longer produce texts, as though the gap between creator and creation, between speaking subject and verses spoken was essential to the procedure of becoming-author. For Léo to repeat this pattern, to pursue this gap, renders his madness cliché at the same time as it exposes the

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For a detailed examination of psycho-sexual paradigms in French-Canadian literature that concentrates specifically on gender difference, see Patricia Smart, Writing in the Father's House.

machinery that generates this cultural economy.

The cinematic parenting of Léolo, again to mention but a few, also raises some rich points. The library of the "dompteur de vers," for instance, is part of a set at Cinecittà studios in Italy. The choice of this particular set allows Lauzon to conjure a rich cinematic history for audiences with a visual memory. Lauzon explains: "l'appartement du dompteur de vers dans le sous-sol, c'est l'entrepôt des statues de Fellini, à Cinecittà. Le dompteur est assis dans la chaise des Damnés de Visconti, entouré des bibliothèques du Nom de la Rose" ("Jean-Claude Lauzon" 41). Here, Lauzon is clearly nodding towards his predecessors, acknowledging his sources, and in a sense, his film's origins, with a slight wink. Federico Fellini's self-reflexivity and focus on the agonies of artistic creation, his emphasis on dreams and fantasy, his non-narrative style which seeks to capture the workings of memory are all discernable influences in Lauzon's film. In particular, Léolo owes much to Fellini's 8 ½ (1963), a film about the filmmaker which explores a "dream-world of adolescent sexual

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See Pierre Nepveu, L'Écologie du réel, 43-61, for a discussion of Nelligan's function in the literary and critical elaboration of a link between exile and madness culminating in an understanding of Québécois literature in terms of a "pratique paradoxale: création et destruction, habitation et expérience des limites, affirmation et négation, simultanément, du sens de l'histoire" (53).

fantasy and childhood memory" (Cook 501) as well as the more autobiographical Amarcord (1974). But Lauzon mentions The Name of the Rose, the film about books based on Umberto Eco's novel of the same name. To recall Eco's intimation of the cultural changes wrought by early printing technologies permits a reading of Léolo as another text which intimates the cultural changes wrought by technologies of cinema and photography.

Another film to which Léolo can trace filiation is Francois Truffaut's Les quatre cents coups (1959), which, like Léolo, is a somewhat autobiographical story about a young boy's forays into the darker elements of life. In this film, like in the films of Fellini, the "author-function" is very much disrupted. Furthermore, Doinel, like Leo, has a peculiar relationship to writing. One episode within Doinel's gradual distancing from the rigid rules of his parents in Les quatre cents coups shows Doinel being kicked out of school for plagiarizing Balzac, and another shows him stealing and then returning a typewriter from his father's place of work. Doinel's "crimes" relating to textual property in these instances are crimes that Léolo as a film is guilty of.

The casting of Denys Arcand as the school counsellor offers an interesting wrinkle in the authorship question. No contemporary filmmaker in Québec has not been influenced

in some way by Arcand's sweeping yet always grounded and local narratives. By casting this director as actor, Lauzon suggests the influence of this auteur on his own work. Strangely, in a film that multiplies and proliferates authors as it questions their individual authority, Lauzon is careful to undermine Arcand's authority. He stresses Arcand's compliance to his own authorial/directorial desires: "quand Denys Arcand est un acteur, il n'est rien d'autre. Il n'y a pas de problème d'*ego* avec lui. Il ne parle pas de cinéma. . . il fait ce qu'on lui demande" ("Jean-Claude Lauzon" 43).

Incorporations

> **The fiction of the creating subject gives way to the frank confiscation, quotation, excerptation, accumulation and repetition of already existing images. Notions of originality, authenticity and presence . . . are undermined. (Crimp 53)**

Marilyn Randall, in an article on plagiarism and decolonization, recalls that "quotation in literature increases during periods of social crises. . . " ("Appropriate(d) Discourse" 527). At some level it is possible to explain that the acknowledged and unacknowledged quotations, citations, allusions, and plagiarisms of other texts in Léolo has to do with what French Canada experiences as "une certaine difficulté d'être" (Aquin, Blocs Erratiques

96). At another level, these incorporations and recyclings of texts have to do with the epistemic shift that postmodernism effects and traces.

Harold Bloom writes that "Influence, as I conceive it, means that there are *no* texts, but only relationships *between* texts" (Map 3). Bloom's oedipal model of influence does bring to mind Léo's struggles with various father figures. Like Bloom's "strong poet," Léo's challenge to his father consists in rewriting precursory texts in order to assert his own identity. Bloom maintains however that there is a difference between good art and bad art, strong poets and weak poets. "To copy second-rate authors indeed is immoral," he asserts in the Times Literary Supplement symposium on plagiarism (413). As a consequence, notions of authenticity and the authority of authorship seep into his theory of literature, and these, as I will explain, are the very values that Léolo appears to seek to undermine in its seeming indiscriminate plundering of comic-book ad narratives alongside canonical masterpieces.

Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality sheds more light on the way Léolo takes up other texts. Turning to Bakhtin, Kristeva writes: "any text is constructed as a

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For a discussion of incorporation as appropriation, see the essays in Bruce Ziff and Pratima Rao, Borrowed Power.

mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (66). Kristeva's model, like Bloom's, focuses on relationships between texts. Unlike Bloom, Kristeva does not make the author into something sacred. Kristeva's author, like Léo in Léolo, disrupts the "author-function" by becoming "an anonymity," "an absence," (74) she explains, because of the dialogism inherent in writing:

> On the basis of this anonymity, this zero where the author is situated, the *he/she* of the character is born. At a later stage, it will become a *proper name* (N). . . . In this coming-and-going movement between subject and other, between writer (W) and reader, the author is structured as a signifier and the text as a dialogue of two discourses. (75)

Her notion of the anonymous author situated at degree zero is more in sync with a film such as Léolo where the proper names of author and character are shifting and mobile. Nevertheless, her vision of writing as dialogue, which considers "writing as a reading of the anterior literary corpus and the text as an absorption of and a reply to another text" (69) preserves a dual structure where lines of communication are drawn as lines.

Daniel Castillo Durante takes Kristeva's notion of absorption to describe intertextual relations and pursues the visceral underpinnings of this image in his work on the stereotype. Taking absorption almost literally, he writes: "On peut concevoir le texte comme ayant pour but de phagocyter l'Autre" (63). This notion of a phagocytotic text, I think, best captures the paradigm of intertextual relationships that Lauzon's film exploits. Recalling the abundance of excremental imagery in Léolo, one could argue that texts in this cultural economy are absorbed and transformed as Kristeva argues, but also masticated, digested, and excreted.

Castillo Durante's phagocytotic model also avoids the linearity inherent in Kristeva's dialogism and opens up to the possibilities Baudrillard recognizes in Marshall McLuhan's thought. Baudrillard says in Simulacres et Simulation that the confusion between medium and message announced by McLuhan correlates with the confusion between "destinateur" and "destinataire," "scellant ainsi la disparition de toutes les structures duelles, polaires, qui faisaient l'organisation discursive du langage" (52). The logical consequence of this confusion and its erasure of all polarities in lines of communication, Baudrillard continues, is that "Le discours 'circule' est à prendre au sens littéral: c'est-à-dire qu'il ne va plus d'un point à un

autre, mais qu'il parcourt un cycle qui englobe *indistinctement* les positions d'émetteur et de récepteur. . ." (52). The phagocytotic text which circulates discourses, incorporating and expelling them in a procedure more random than dialogue, is, in effect, a repeating, or even recycling machine.

The Question of History

Lauzon's voice-over narrative technique, criticized for being so repetitive, conjures a writing/speaking subject who is split into a past and a present "I" (or, alternately, a present and future "I"). The fact that the one "I" often repeats the words of the other indicates that both selves, be they Lauzon and Lozeau, or Lozeau and Lozone, are engaged in the same work of remembering, blurring, and re-writing the past. But what is that past?

Anthony Purdy's work on writing in Québec and particularly his work on Hubert Aquin has stressed a conception of history as story. In A Certain Difficulty of Being, Purdy draws special attention to Aquin's insistence that Québec's history has always been written by

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Purdy's argument is not significantly different from Linda Hutcheon's. In "History and/as Intertext" Hutcheon works out her argument concerning historiographic metafiction which is based on the understanding that "history becomes a text, a discursive construct upon which literature draws as easily as it does upon other artistic contexts" (170).

someone else (85). Aquin writes in "L'existence politique," "notre histoire est écrite d'avance et n'offre aucune possibilité de rebondissement" (Blocs 52). Aquin's politics of decolonization, informed by Memmi and Fanon, emerged from a reasonably clear idea of who is dictating Québec's history, but Lauzon in 1992 does not live in quite the same political situation as Aquin did in 1962, when "L'existence politique" was first published. Nevertheless, Lauzon's film picks up the same problematic relationship between voice and history (or story).

In an essay from 1969 entitled "La mort de l'écrivain maudit," Aquin suggests that, as a result of Québec's colonial legacy, all the cultural practices originating there are by necessity contaminated by certain ontological and epistemological questions: how to be Québécois while writing, and how to write while being Québécois.

> Quel que soit le message d'un écrivain québécois, quel que soit le contenu d'un livre ou d'un écrit, il se trouve – malgré lui – devant le problème suivant: inventer une nouvelle façon d'être québécois en écrivant des livres. . . . Je dis simplement qu'il n'est pas facile d'être québécois. . . et que cela se vérifie dans la production littéraire québécoise, tout comme dans d'autres secteurs d'activités. . . . (Blocs 150)

Aquin draws an explicit connection between problems of identity and problems of cultural production. The challenge for the writer in Québec, he says, is to find a new way of being while writing stories caught in a history dictated by others. The author in Québec must thus negotiate a tricky dialectic of originality and repetition that seems to have no resolution, for Aquin, outside of the paroxysms of revolution.

Describing a profound alienation from self that makes him torn between fantasies of escape and a commitment to the local, Aquin writes: "J'ai voulu être étranger à moi-même" (Blocs 97). A similar desire for "self-othering," to use Simon During's term, through writing, can be witnessed in Lauzon's Léo (During 87). Writing for Léo is always presented as means of escape from his milieu and from himself. Léo's autobiographical practice of remembering the past serves also to help him forget, and if not forget, rewrite by incorporating and thus transforming it.

Léo's literary mentor, the "dompteur de vers," encourages Léo to write and dream and thus escape the abyss of his family. The narrator explains:

> Il m'a fallu longtemps pour comprendre qu'il [le dompteur] était la réincarnation de Don Quichotte et qu'il avait décidé de se battre contre l'idiotisme et de me protéger contre le gouffre de

ma famille.

The allusion to Don Quixote here evokes a certain relationship between Léo's writing and his cultural history. Robert Alter argues in Partial Magic that the novel form begins "out of an erosion of belief in the authority of the written word and it begins with Cervantes" (3). Alter deals extensively with the self-reflexive quality of Don Quixote, and emphasizes that from Cervantes on,

> cultural creativity would proceed more and more through a recapitulative critique of its own past, and a major line of fiction would be avowedly duplicitous, making the paradox of its magically real duplicity one of its principal subjects. (29)

But more important, the allusion also suggests the futility of the "dompteur's" rescuing gesture. Access to the rarefied world of literature and dreams is its own form of madness. Under the "saving" influence of books, Léo will be doomed to repeat the fatal end of his family. For Cervantes' Don Quixote, life and text collide when he

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This comment links Lauzon's thought back to Hubert Aquin's, who argued throughout his life against the use of joual. In the interview "Hubert Aquin et le jeu de l'écriture," Aquin explained: ". . . si on se contente de transcrire le joual, ça ne va pas, parce qu'il y a des modes d'expressions, d'idiotismes; un parler ça roule, c'est un échange continuel. Mais la littérature c'est avant tout un travail de conception et non la transcription d'un parler" (10).

attempts to re-write a literary past into a lived present, living out the clichéd literary tradition of knightly chivalry. Léo too re-writes his cultural past, incorporating clichés made so by their repetition in culture, into his life and his life-writing. Thus, while Léo attempts to escape his familial and cultural origins through writing and reading, he paradoxically returns to them through these same practices. If he requires protection from the abyss of his family, he does write about them in his journals. And if he wishes he were Italian instead of French-Canadian, he reads and rereads, and copies out the words of a French-Canadian novel – Ducharme's L'avalée, a novel that, as I have said, comes metonymically to represent Art and Literature in general and specifically French-Canadian culture – integrating this text fully into his spoken and written discourse. Whatever the message of his writings, whatever attempts he makes at self-othering through language, he finds himself facing the same problem as Aquin: to find a new way of being Québécois while writing

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The dompteur's battle against "idiotisme" can also be taken in its grammatical sense here, to refer to the use of idiomatic language. To understand the political implications of Pierre Bourgault's character's Quixotic task of fighting the use of idiom to preserve a higher, more universal and less local form of language, see Hubert Aquin's argument condemning the use of "joual" in "Le joual-refuge."

books. He may attempt to efface, forget, and re-write his cultural history, but his story cannot be told without it.

History in Léolo is never explicitly presented as history, and perhaps this explains how Lauzon can emphatically claim that there is nothing political in the film. In an interview, when asked whether his film contains a political message, Lauzon laughs:

> c'est drôle, parce que les gens commencent à y voir un message politique incroyable. . . . Je n'ai pas pensé à ça du tout. C'est sincère, je ne suis absolument pas politique. Je ne pense pas politiquement. ("Jean-Claude Lauzon" 33-4)

Yet so much about this film suggests politics. The casting of former RIN leader Pierre Bourgault as the word-tamer brings up the history of separatist discourse with its successes and failures for those who already know the history. When Fernand is beaten up twice by an anglophone, the film powerfully evokes the discrepancies in power between English and French in Canada. I have already brought up the film's opening sequence which situates the

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Carole Corbeil makes a seemingly innocent remark that exposes the very politics Lauzon is set on denying: "Because Lauzon is determinedly apolitical, and calls himself a Canadian filmmaker as opposed to a Quebec filmmaker, he was especially embraced by the English-Canadian press." (87) Considering that Lauzon's Léo's chief rhetorical manoeuvre is to deny being that which he is, Lauzon's comment must be taken sceptically.

action "chez moi" as Montréal, Canada rather than Montréal, Québec, Canada, which leads into Léo's denial that he is "un Canadien Français" where he paradoxically asserts this identity over the identity of being and not being Québécois.

Purdy discusses Aquin's use of the terms "French Canada" and "French-Canadian," and shows that Aquin's use of these terms

> in no way compromises his separatist position; on the contrary, it is essential to his formulation of the historical problem and is closely connected with his conception of dialectic fatigue. . . . *French Canada* represents a cultural group which defines itself historically in relation to another group – that of English Canada. (A Certain Difficulty 86-87)

When Lauzon re-deploys these same terms in a post-referendum text produced in the 1990s but set in the 1960s before any referendum, he might signal a regret that history is still, as Aquin had said before him, a tale told by others. The terms, of course, also emphasize language as the most important constituent factor in identity, and for Lauzon's film about writing and language, this is historical and political.

In Aquin's writings, French Canada appears to be a

society nourished by its own frozen stories and clichés, its own paralysed history, and Léolo's relationship to French-Canadian history follows the same dialectic as the film's relationship with other stories. Lauzon's and Léo's rhetorical strategies of denial and active attempts to forget history initiate a process of remembering, incorporating, and transforming or rewriting history. As my chapters on Trou de mémoire and Neige noire will elaborate, Hubert Aquin's texts bemoan the epistemological circularity of this economy and the ontological insecurity it creates, characterized by the certain difficulty of being. Rather than reject repetition, however, Léolo celebrates it and more important, ritualizes it.

The Practice of Recycling

> **McLuhan saw modern technologies as 'extensions of man'. We should see them, rather, as 'expulsions of man'. (Baudrillard, The Perfect Crime 35)**

Castillo Durante offers the image of the "texte-poubelle" or "*texte-pourrissoir*" alongside his image of the omnivorous phagocytotic text (65). The "texte-poubelle" is the site where signs are recycled in accordance with the ideologemes which determine what can and cannot be enunciated by discourse (65). This idea of cultural

recycling is crucial to an understanding of the images of excrement and garbage that fill the screen throughout the film; Léolo uses these images to thematize its own discursive strategy and to comment on the economy of representation in a postmodern age.

There are three slightly different modes of recycling presented in the film, practised by Léo's French-Canadian father, by his literary mentor and surrogate father-figure the "dompteur de vers," and by Léo himself, all of which highlight particular aspects of cultural production and reproduction through a configuring of body and text that is typical of the other texts I will discuss in this dissertation.

The French-Canadian father may be slave to the machine but is without a doubt the high-priest of excrement. Only once does this father speak, to repeat Léo's name in cooing tones trying to coax his son out of the chicken coop to take his enema. Never does the father read or write. He appears to us in the film not as speaking subject, not as agent of discourse, but as pure corporeality caught up in processes

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For other discussions of recycling as a cultural practice, see Claude Dionne, Silvestra Mariniello and Walter Moser's Recyclages: Économies de l'appropriation culturelle, Frank Plans, "Language and Earth as Recycling Machines," Michael Toolan, "On Recyclings and Irony," as well as Richard Nelly, "Cultural Peripheries: Latin America and Postmodernist De-Centering."

that exceed will and intention. His mouth and hands are used mostly for shoving food in his mouth and offering laxatives and enemas to his family. Like the Sicilian father of Léo's dreams, his real, French-Canadian father whose existence is denied so forcefully, is a man of instinct. While the dream father uses his hands to produce pleasure while working with produce (ripe tomatoes destined for food), and he is excessively fertile, Léo's real father is more interested in eating and excreting than in sexual discharge, and his labours appear sterile and mechanistic. The real father reverses the dream father's libidinal economy based on discharge and participates instead in an economy based on incorporation, evacuation, and preservation.

In "The Excremental Sublime" Roberto Maria Dainotto writes of the postmodern individual with "a sublime ability to evacuate," and cites Robert Coover, "for whom evacuation is 'the closest we ever come to the gods'" (22). In Léolo, the father who is slave to the machine at work becomes priest through his administering of laxatives to his family every Friday. Convinced that "la santé venait en chiant," the father oversees a communion-like ritual of reverse transubstantiation offered with religious fervour which replaces the host – the body of Christ which is not the body of Christ – with the laxative – food which is not food.

Powerless elsewhere, the father insists in this area on controlling not merely his family's incorporation of the laxative, checking under their tongues to see if they have swallowed it, but also his family's evacuation, bearing witness to the results of his sacrament by examining the faeces when they are done. This father, who neither reads nor writes, authors, through his ministering of the laxatives, the signs he has his children produce, (for the word "sign" also describes faeces found on a trail). And in a bizarre hermeneutic circle, he reads these signs as text to determine their health. Though perhaps unproductive, his activities constitute a real production in the theatrical sense. This weekly scene of directing the family's ingestions and excretions can be conceived of as a particular example of cultural expression, governed by an economy that is repetitive and cyclical.

The father's demand for a "sign" prompts Léo to undertake his own subversive strategy of recycling. Unwilling to ingest his father's laxatives, Léo gives them to his sister. He then collects Rita's faeces to present to his pleased father as his own. His father smiles at his son's healthy stool – a visible, odorific, material proof of his son's health. But this sign is borrowed, the text of Léo's health is plagiarized, and is, in the father's system,

a simulation. Baudrillard explains: "simulation threatens the difference between 'true' and 'false', between 'real' and 'imaginary'. . . this lack of distinction is the worst form of subversion" (Simulations 5, 7). Léo's faecal borrowings pervert and subvert his father's elaborate signifying system. By replacing the guarantor of the father's signifying system with what is not exactly a copy but which is indistinguishable from the original nevertheless, Léo robs this system of its authority. His father can no longer claim authorship over all aspects of his little production. Since shitting replaces speaking, Beckett/Foucault's question remains pertinent: "What does it matter who...?"

Léo wishes to be a writer and a dreamer, making bodies subservient to the powers of language. Although he proves he can borrow the techniques of recycling of his father's systems of sign production and use them to undermine the system, he must learn how to do the same with words. The other father-figure, the enigmatic "dompteur de vers," guides him in this task.

When compared with Léo's disowned French-Canadian father, the "dompteur de vers" is treated with unadulterated admiration. And yet, the word-tamer's practice is not dissimilar to the father's. As the narrator explains, the

"dompteur de vers"[1] "passait ses nuits à fouiller dans toutes les poubelles du monde." While the father is concerned with eliciting the production of signs to be read as text from the body, the "dompteur" works only with materials that are already texts: "Il ne s'intéressait qu'aux lettres et aux photos." And if the father's practice of recycling recalls the rituals of Church, the dompteur operates not within Church but within Library. There is nevertheless something sacramental about the library lit by hundreds of candles which makes the word-tamer appear as a high priest of Culture. An archetypal archivist, Bourgault's character salvages, collects, and organizes discarded fragments of text. Rather than get caught up in a hermeneutic circle of vexed authorship and reading, he simply allows the texts to speak.

The library where he works recalls the library (Berlin's Staatsbibliothek) in Wim Wenders' Wings of Desire, a place where memory, history, and story intersect through innumerable voices reading and repeating fragments from

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[1] The "vers" can be taken to mean both verses and worms – creatures of recycling.

texts. It also recalls the library in Borges' "The Library of Babel." Castillo Durante refers to this story of Borges and evokes his "tentative d'imaginer tous les textes comme fragments à peine modifiés d'une Bibliothèque infinie" (66). Borges' image of a "*bibliopharthénogenèse*," Castillo Durante continues, explains the "déjà-là du texte" (66), and offers another way of visualizing the way texts intersect and incorporate one another. Castillo Durante, drawing from Barthes, shows that one implication of Borges' library is a redefinition of the status of the "author":

> L'"auteur" ne peut à partir de là que revendiquer un nouveau statut. Celui que lui accorde l'irresponsabilité d'un scribe des *lieux communs*. Il recueille – *stéréo-copieur* de la *res publica* – l'écho des voix anonymes qui peuplent toutes les croisées où s'engorgent les différents discours sillonant le social. (66)

The library of Léolo, as a repository where the word-tamer collects all of society's stories, fragments of stories, and fragmented histories, like Borges' library,

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Like Léolo, Wenders' Wings of Desire opens and closes with images of writing, and relies on a technique of montage of voices. Rather than allow the bodies on the screen to speak lines of dialogue, both films exploit a disjunction between the body and voice-track. For an analysis of the body in Wenders' film, see Brigitte Peucker, Incorporating Images, 138-142.

provides an image of a matrix from which all subsequent texts may be generated. As preserver and guardian of this matrix, the word-tamer ensures that culture is recycled by making certain that the texts are distributed, incorporated into new productions, and both are returned to the matrix. He is the one responsible for "feeding" Léo's textual appetite in the first place when he initially lends out the copy of Ducharme's novel. Léo devours this text at night by, of course, the light of the refrigerator, and indeed, he fully incorporates Ducharme's words into his own textual productions so that his subsequent precocious scribblings are to a large extent plagiarisms and borrowings. To complete the circle of recycling, the last scene of the film shows the tamer gathering and binding the scraps and pieces of Léo's writing, and placing them back on the library shelves, next to Ducharme's novel, where presumably they will provide food for some other "author's" thought.

Since the film presents a portrait-of-the-artist, I think it is very significant that its author-protagonist learns his techniques of cultural production and working with texts from two father-figures who practice recycling. Within this economy, original art does not exist, and authority of authorship is seriously undermined. What remains possible is a typically colonial process of

bricolage. Like Lévi-Strauss' *bricoleur*, Léo incorporates into his constructions the remains of previous constructions and destructions (Genette 63). But where the *bricoleur* preserves a distinction between creating subject and created object, the very corporeal images of incorporation and excretion lend to the concept of recycling a complexity that tends to confuse categories of creator and created.

It becomes quite obvious that the paradigm of recycling through incorporation and excretion radically reconfigures the concept of reproduction, both sexual and textual. Steven Pinter and Greg Nielson write that "even in the postmodern crisis of signs and disciplines, we still dream, think and [pro]create" (70). However, in Lauzon's film, this is not strictly true. For sexual reproduction and by extension, any kind of textual production of the new, certain labours are required, and these are consistently elided or displaced by all of the characters in this film. Although the film is plagued with various sorts of libidinous practices, nowhere do we ever see the penetration of two human bodies. Léo's conception involves the chance encounter of his mother's body with a tomato; his dream father and he both masturbate into food; his grandfather pays to watch the beautiful Bianca ingest his toenails; Léo and a friend pay for another young girl to masturbate them

both; a schoolmate rapes a cat; Fernand performs push-ups with his brother on his back. Perhaps this is what makes the film shocking and perverted: Léolo documents a major shift in the way creative labours are conceived and enacted.

Roy accuses the film of an aesthetic of kitsch, and I agree with this accusation. Matei Calinescu notes that kitsch is difficult to define. He begins with a simple observation that "kitsch – for all its diversity – suggests repetition, banality, triteness" (226). Certainly, Calinescu's use of the word evokes the way that Roy deploys the term – Roy opposes Léo's "art kitsch et pompier" to "la poésie naturelle et vraie" (Roy 16). Calinescu however turns to Ludwig Giesz's hypothesis, outlined in Phänomenologie des Kitsches, "that links kitsch to the German verb *kitschen*, in the sense of 'collecting rubbish from the street' (*den Strassenschlamm zusammenscharren*)" (Calinescu 234) – defining precisely the labours that the "dompteur de vers" performs. Calinescu continues to note that "*kitschen* has indeed this specific meaning in the southwestern part of Germany; it can also mean 'to make new furniture from old' (*neue Möbel auf alt zurichten*)" (234).

Because of the influence of the "dompteur" and his own father, Léo's writing *is* kitsch: it is entirely and irrevocably linked to his collecting of textual and material

garbage and waste, and consists in incorporating this waste into his own productions and reproductions. By this measure, Lauzon's film too is kitsch, for Léo's strategy is Lauzon's strategy. Calinescu claims that

> the whole concept of kitsch clearly centres around such questions as imitation, forgery, counterfeit, and what we may call the aesthetics of deception and self-deception. Kitsch may be conveniently defined as a specifically aesthetic form of lying. (229)

Léolo, as I have shown, clearly centres around these same questions. But does this mean that Roy's other accusation is true, that the film follows an aesthetic of advertising which prompts it to "comptabilise le monde comme une marchandise" (Roy 16)?

Indeed, it does. In a scene structured according to the conventions of allegory, Léolo evinces disgust for a plastic flower his mother has placed in his room. "Ma mère nous a fait cadeau d'une belle rose en plastique, " the narrator recounts, ". . . parce qu'une fleur est une image, ou plutôt, une idée de la nature." The flower may be an image or an idea of nature – a representation – but it does not look natural:

> Son rouge écarlate est étouffée par la poussière qui l'enterre de plus en plus à chaque jour. Si

au moins quelqu'un de la famille pouvait s'apercevoir que cette fleur manque de naturel, avec sa petite étiquette dorée "Made in Hong Kong" collée sous un pétale.

The flower, which offers an image of nature, betrays itself, revealing to those who care to notice that it is just image, but more important, just a product (and not even a local product, but a product of multinational capitalism). Léo knows he can restore this sign to the fullness of its illusion. "Il suffirait d'un petit geste sans effort de ma part pour décoller cette étiquette et commencer à croire à cette illusion," the narrator says. "Mais je refuse d'y toucher. Je ne veux pas prendre ma place en ce cimetière des morts vivants."

Critics have interpreted this comment in terms that see it reflecting Léo's fear of contamination by that which is kitschy, not true poetry. For instance, the write-up prepared by the Cinémathèque québécoise in their Annuaire du cinéma québécois asks: "Pourquoi est-il seul à voir la différence entre une rose de plastique et la beauté d'une vraie fleur, entre le mensonge et la poésie?" (77). The reverse is more true; Léo is the only one who sees that it doesn't matter whether there is a difference. He refuses to remove the label from the plastic rose not because he has any fear of contamination by "impure signs," but because the

label is what reveals the economy of this sign.

Léo Lozeau/Léolo Lozone/Jean-Claude Lauzon's story is overflowing with "impure signs," borrowed from an economy of multinational capitalism that mass-produces, reproduces, and circulates signs as products. Léo's dreams of Italy are modelled on the postcard. His true love Bianca conforms to the literary commonplace of the beautiful and good prostitute as well as Dante's Beatrice. His autobiographical tale of origins repeats the story of the "immaculate conception." His "authorship" replicates that of Proust, Rousseau, Joyce, Nelligan among others. His prose and poetry plagiarizes other works. Léo/lo/lo/zo/ne has no fear of impurety. He steals his sister's faeces to expose and subvert his father's economy of signs, just as he leaves the sticker on the rose to expose and subvert this larger economy of signs.

Repeating Machines

> **All institutions of language are repeating machines: school, sport, advertising, popular song, news, all continually repeat the same structure, the same meaning, often the same words. (Barthes, Pleasure 40)**

This chapter began with McLuhan's comment regarding the explosive potential of crossings or hybridizations of media, and promised to examine what the linking of sex and text in Léolo, in the context of a film about writing and

authorship, could indicate about its cultural economy. The figure of the ingesting and expelling body has linked up with a theoretical model of intertextual creation, where questions of originality and authority are rendered tangential. The images of eating, gathering, and collecting garbage, waste, and excrement reveal a self-reflexive strategy that comments on its own strategies of recycling. The film, like its protagonists, borrows structures, meanings, and even words from elsewhere, and spits them out with "great new force and energy" (McLuhan, Understanding Media 48). This economy of recycling is ambivalent, however. It inevitably becomes incestuous (as when Léolo learns the pleasures of reading while "riding" his brother's shoulders), or spins into a vicious circle that leads him to repeat the madness and silence that haunt his ancestors.

Along these lines, I conclude this chapter with Barthes' comment which links a practice of repetition to the image of a "repeating machine" (Pleasure 40). "All institutions of language," Barthes claims, "are repeating machines" (40). The observation is crucial. All technologies of reproduction, from the technology of moveable print, to the technology of static photo image and moving cinematic image, stamp out a culture of repeating

fragments, a culture in fragments." But the human body is also a machine of language, a repeating machine." In this postmodern economy of signs that has inherited what Andreas Huyssen has termed the "technological imagination" that "can be best grasped in . . . art forms which can not only be reproduced, but are in fact designed for mechanical reproducibility" (9), and what Mark Seltzer has termed the "body-machine complex," that is, "the radical entanglement of relations of meaning and relations of force, and, along the same lines, the radical entanglement of writing, bodies, and mechanics" (Bodies and Machines 15), we must return to Kroker and Cook's query, cited as an epigraph to this chapter. Amidst the "signs of detritus, wreckage and refuse" and the triumph of "excremental culture," What, as they ask, of the "place of art" in this scene(7)?

The industrial assembly line, is, according to Marshall McLuhan, "the gift of Gutenberg": "The power to translate knowledge into mechanical production by the breaking up of any process into fragmented aspects to be placed in a lineal sequence of movable, yet uniform, parts was the formal essence of the printing press. (Understanding Media 116).

Jeffrey Masten, Peter Stallybrass and Nancy Vickers cite John Bulwer from 1650 who referred to "'the curious Machine of Speech,' the human machine that functions through the bodily parts of lips and tongue and vocal cords and nose" (1).

The question of violence is so central to contemporary life and art, and at the same time so unanswerable, that it threatens to become our major concern. (Kroetsch 94)

Maybe I'm not understanding the question . . . ? (Brad Pitt to Morgan Freeman in Seven)

Chapter Three

The Body Stamped Out

"Serial Signs" and the (Re)Production of Body Violence in David Fincher's Seven and Hubert Aquin's Trou de mémoire

"And what, then, of the place of art . . . in the post-modern scene?" Kroker and Cook ask us (7). This chapter begins with a provocative answer from Fredric Jameson's Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. Remarking on the impact that American modes of economic and military practice have had on global postmodern culture, Jameson writes that "the underside of culture is blood, torture, death, terror" (5). Putting the question of military machinery to one side, Jameson's comment linking postmodern culture to violence can lead to an analysis of modes of cultural production and reproduction in hybrid texts. This chapter addresses questions raised by American practices of production and consumption within a generic practice that, like Léolo's revisiting of the *künstlerroman* narrative, is also heavily indebted to patterns of repetition. The texts of "serial killing" explore another

configuration of representation and repetition that uses the human body as its chief vehicle and metaphor within an economy that is more excessive and more extreme than the praxis of bricolage envisioned by Lauzon's film. David Fincher's Seven, now recognized as one of the model texts of the serial killing genre, explicitly reveals the interests of this generic hybrid and its relationship to a textual and technological economy that strives to reimpose the myth of the original and potent author in a world of copies. Hubert Aquin's Trou de mémoire, when reread in light of these generic paradigms, exposes its own interests in the way serial culture makes visible tensions between production and destruction.

Serial Killing

> **But for the rest of us, who may wish to understand what is happening, real violence is not so interesting as imitations. (Herron 190)**

Mark Seltzer has described "serial murder and its representations" as "the most popular genre-fiction of the body and of body violence in our culture" ("Serial Killers (1)" 92). Popular culture bears this out: in North America, we are currently witnessing a proliferation of highly successful television shows, movies, and novels about serial killers and serial killing. In the cinema, from mainstream hits like Silence of the Lambs to marginal films like Henry,

Portrait of a Serial Killer, and in literature, from Joyce Carol Oate's Zombie to Bret Easton Ellis' American Psycho, the cultural machine keeps producing and reproducing these narratives of body violence. "In short," Steffen Hantke writes, "serial killing, like any commodity, is mass produced and mass consumed" (101).

The popularity of the serial killer narrative in itself would not necessarily warrant consideration in a work dedicated to Canadian postmodernity in literature and film if it were not for the felicitous etymological moment Seltzer brings up, when, in the 1970s, FBI special agent Robert Ressler coined the term "serial killing" and thereby brought together two formerly distinct ideas. Before Ressler, the British designation of "crimes in series" was used to describe repetitive crimes. Ressler's insight was his recognition of a parallel between this designation of criminal activities and the repetitive aspects of art in the age of mechanical reproduction as they were evidenced in Hollywood movie culture. Ressler connected his own pleasurable dissatisfaction at the cliff-hanger endings the "serial adventures we used to see on Saturday at the movies" which compelled him to return to the theatre the next week to catch the continuation, with the presumably pleasurable dissatisfaction that occurs in the minds of killers which prompts them to return to and repeat the scene of their

crime (Seltzer "Serial Killers (1)", 93). The concept of serial killing was thus born out of one of the core practices of the technology of the cinema. Moreover, Ressler's act of naming renders visible a crucial relationship – that serial crime (Jameson's blood, torture, death, terror) is quite literally the underside of serial culture. Both culture and crime are repetitive practices, addictive in their eternal irresolution, and both culture and crime indicate an economy where pleasure and pain, creation and destruction closely coincide. I am not prepared here to deal with real serial killing – only its representation, which offers an important (because blatant and obvious) textual site within which to begin to address an extraordinary nexus of concerns about representation and repetition, where the production and reproduction of culture and body-culture in the twentieth century appear to reach an impasse. The serial-killer narrative articulates a curious yet archetypal, representative situation where the creation

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Anne Friedberg discusses the market strategies of serial films as being hinged on the frustration of non-closure: "Serial films – different from series films that were complete in each installment – were another successful marketing strategy as the film industry began to experiment with longer narratives. . . . Based on the pulp pop-cultural format of the serialized western, comic book or melodrama, the serial connected otherwise complete narratives by frustrating their closure" (Window Shopping 176). Serial novelists such as Dickens, who was acknowledged by Sergei Eisenstein to be crucial to the development of narrative cinema for other reasons, should be added to her list.

of narrative and the production of texts proceeds according to the destruction of bodies. Within the "genre-fiction" of serial killing, we find a cultural economy of pure excess, where to produce and reproduce is to destroy, and where (thinking especially of the cannibal killer in Silence of the Lambs) to consume is to incorporate.

Hantke, writing on recent serial-killer films, observes that "one of the distinctive features associated with all serial killer narratives . . . is technology and its functions" (99). But it is Seltzer who elaborates the connections between the machine culture emerging from the industrial revolution and representations of repetitive violence. Seltzer focuses on "the inaugural writings of the age of the sex-crime" from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. He looks with detail at Bram Stoker's Dracula, John London's Barleycorn, and Zola's La Bête Humaine. These texts emerge at the time of a shift at the turn of the century Seltzer describes in terms of "the difference, and tension, between possessive individualism and market culture, on the one side, and disciplinary individualism and machine culture, on the other" ("Serial Killers (1)" 101). In these texts, he finds an overwhelming preponderance of references to what he calls "technologies of reproduction": "recording, writing, shorthand, typewriting, and mechanical impression or registration"

(102). In Dracula, for instance, Seltzer remarks that

> what become conspicuous are the ways in which numbers, writing, and bodies indicate each other in circular fashion, such that writing and counting, word counts and body counts, figures and masses, mathematical series and serial killing, addictive consumerism and addictive cannibalism are drawn into taut relation – and not least in the figure of the "Count" himself. (105)

Now in postmodern literature, these strategical relationships might be loosely attributed to self-reflexive metafictional strategies without further explanation. Seltzer's discussion of what he terms "primary mediation" historicizes and contextualizes the suturings of "life processes and the machine process, erotics and mechanics" (106). His insight is significant: by correlating body and machine, reproduction and destruction, within the general economy of industrial capitalism, Seltzer points to a productive way of dealing with the repetitive practices that are produced, solicited by, and make up machine culture, and sheds light on characteristics shared by modern literature generally, not simply narratives about serial-killers.

With a Hammer

> **For once to pose questions here with a hammer, and, perhaps, to hear as a reply that**

famous hollow sound which speaks of bloated entrails — what a delight for one who has ears even behind his ears. . . (Nietzsche 465)

David Fincher's Seven conforms to all the predictable characteristics of serial killer narratives identified by Caputi and Hantke,[*] yet this film potently allegorizes the cultural economy of our contemporary scene. Fincher's film tells the story of two detectives, played by Brad Pitt and Morgan Freeman, who must investigate a series of spectacular murders in a dark, decayed urban landscape. The serial killer John Doe, played with delicate mania by Kevin Spacey, conceives of murder as cultural production. Doe arranges his corpses in such a fashion that they demand to be "read"

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[*] Jane Caputi lists as the generic characteristics of the serial killer narrative the "mythicization" of the serial killer to a "heroic status" which "participates in a cultural propagation of frequently lethal misogyny" (101), the portrayal of the serial killer as "the product of U.S. American consumer ideologies and class hierarchies" (103), and the coincidence of "femicidal" with "ecocidal" intents (104). Peter Hantke adds to this list "a concern with breaking taboos," "a recurring social and ideological topography revolving around the issues of public versus private space" and "an idiosyncratic appropriation of tropes and narrative conventions from other genres" (92).

Marshall McLuhan, in an address, noticed that "The artist, for the past century, has increasingly fused or merged with the criminal in popular estimation. . ." and continued, "crime has become obsessional in our society as a form of artistic expression" (Eric McLuhan, Essential McLuhan 226).

as text.[4]

Foucault wrote in the first volume of The History of Sexuality that "today it is sex that serves as a support for the ancient form – so familiar and important – of preaching" (7). It could be argued in this film that sex-as-sermon is replaced by sex-murder-as-sermon. In an age where the mass-production and dissemination of spectacle are a commonplace, John Doe, who wishes to remind the world that it is a fallen world, rationalizes his "work." "Wanting people to listen," Doe muses, "you can't just tap them on the shoulder anymore. You have to hit them over the head with a sledgehammer." It is crucial to appreciate how our serial killer's sledgehammer, at once artist's chisel and cold murder weapon, does not create original art. Rather, it is a machine of repetition. John Doe's serial crime scenes represent to the "fallen world" a cogent intertextual genealogy of Western culture, from medieval to postmodern, through particularly literary (and painterly) tropes.

Morgan Freeman's Detective Sommerset, the older, wiser, eminently cultured investigator, recognizes the essentially intertextual nature of John Doe's crime scenes. He spends

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[4] John Doe's tableaux, static compositions achieved through laborious processes, can be productively compared to the transitional aesthetics of the *tableaux vivants* and the "scenography" Barthes identifies in Sade's work (Sade Fourier, 154-6).

his nights in libraries, pouring though the Western canon to locate the allusions of Doe's work, and identifies Dante, Milton, and Shakespeare as sources for Doe's didactic sermons on sin and decadence. In doing so, Sommerset traces for us a history of violence in representation, and indeed provides a context from which a materialist critique might ensue. In Sommerset's library - research scene, the camera's close-ups of words and woodcut images of graphic violence underline the repetitive viscerality of our canonical texts of high literature. The woodcut images reproduced in these books are startling, and depict bodies being tortured, headless bodies, bodies in pain. Inserts fill the screen with syntactical fragments like "children slain" and "tear flesh." This sequence is intercut with a sequence depicting Detective Mills' examination of police report files containing photos of the bodies of the murder victims, with inserts of similar phrases, for instance "windpipe," and "victim forced to mutilate." Through this unsubtle parallel montage, "real" contemporary violence and "represented" violence are shown to be analogous and continuous.

This sequence addresses Ihab Hassan's question about an "epistemic as well as social mutation" ("The Question" 125). The problem of the present society of the spectacle is shown to originate in earlier cultural technologies developed in

early modern Europe, technologies which fragment and dislocate the body[11], and present it piecemeal to developing markets in daily changing forms[12]. Sommerset's cultural knowledge seems limited to old, hardcover, leather-bound texts, however. He neglects Doe's clear allusions to modernist and postmodernist traditions, to art in the machine age. Most obviously, he misses the reference to Andy Warhol's silk-screened Campbell's soup cans in the first sin/scene depicting gluttony, where an obese man is force-fed cans of pasta and tomato sauce until he explodes.

Warhol's art, stamped out on canvas after canvas, speaks repetitively of repetition, of the production of un-originality in consumer capitalism, and the consumption of sameness in this economy, and is thus provides an

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For accounts of the fragmentation of the body in the book and woodcut of Renaissance Europe See David Hillman and Carla Mazio, The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe, especially Nancy J. Vicker's essay on the blazon "Members Only," p.2-22, and David Hillman's "Visceral Knowledge," p.53-80.

See Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," for a history of techniques of mechanical reproduction that links them explicitly to expanding markets, especially p. 218-219.

appropriate intertext for the sin of gluttony.[11] John Doe's reference to Warhol raises other issues that are relevant to an exploration (in our theory and his own praxis) of seriality. Anne Friedberg has argued that Warhol's canvases have an intimate relationship with the technology of film:

> In a sense, even before Warhol began making "movies," his silkscreen work followed the historical trajectory from photography to film. As he spatially reproduced his close-up 'part objects' (Marylin's lips, Coke bottles) they became temporalized into a series of repeated 'part objects' that produce an image of timelessness. (Window Shopping 171)

In other words, in content and in form, Warhol's art reflects a cross-pollination of painting and film.[12] Friedberg argues, moreover, that Warhol's particular

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Jameson mentions Warhol's soup cans in Postmodernism to raise "one of the central issues about postmodernism itself and its possible political dimensions: Andy Warhol's work in fact turns centrally around commodification. . . [and] explicitly foreground[s] the commodity fetishism of a transition to late capital" (9). Warhol's work does not make a powerful or critical political statement, though, which leads Jameson to conclude evidence of "some fundamental mutation both in the object world itself – now become a set of texts or simulacra – and in the disposition of the subject" (9).

For a discussion of Warhol's relationship to film, particularly the notion of stardom, see Russell Ferguson, "Beautiful Moments."

negotiation of mechanical reproduction fragments the subject, and distorts its spatial and temporal coherence:

> A key element of Warhol's work was the metonymic display of the multiple: identical images repeated (like unchanging film frames) in serial – but not sequential – repetition. Grounded in rubber stamp multiples, a staple of the commercial art illustration world when Warhol entered it in the late 1940s, the multiple became a central strategy in Warhol's work. Not only were works produced in silkscreen series, they were exhibited in multiple serialized display. . . . The subject here was fragmented here by its identical reproducibility. In this way Warhol used mechanical reproduction both diachronically and synchronically – spatially and temporally. (Window Shopping 171)

"Repetition affords access, in effect, to a different temporality" which abolishes the pathos of time which is usually linked to birth, life, and death," Roland Barthes notes in an article on pop art ("That Old Thing, Art..." 234). As a consequence, at stake in Warhol's spectacular repetitions, Barthes stipulates, "is not only the destruction of art but also (moreover, they go together) another conception of the human subject" (234). Certainly, when Warhol proclaims "I think everybody should be a

machine. . . . The reason I'm painting this way is that I want to be a machine, and I feel that whatever I do and do machinelike is want I want to do," he announces a subject position frozen in a circular (and perhaps unproductive) logic (Swenson 118-19). Even more than the futurists' "man multiplied by the machine" and their announcement of a "new mechanical sense, a fusion of instinct with the efficiency of motors and conquered force," Warhol's mechanical subject mirrors the modes of production of industrial capitalism (Marinetti, "Destruction of Syntax").

Warhol's soup cans are obviously potent symbols of serial culture. When Warhol reproduces the sterile uniformity of soup can and its insubstantial content intended to be consumed by, and incorporated into, the human body, he implicates his own artistic praxis in the economy that homogenizes and standardizes the very things that sustain and feed us. Through the paradox of the representation of processed food, Warhol tells us that, in this age of mechanical reproduction, the cultural products that we consume daily (including his own) are stamped out as though with a sledgehammer. Campbell's soup is thus implicated in a subtle form of body violence that is linked explicitly with the dehumanizing, flavourless mechanical processes and methods of consumer capitalism.

When John Doe re-produces Warhol's reproductions of

mass-produced food, he makes very explicit the body-violence that is only implicit in the "original" Warhols. The glutton, whose dark, dirty home is lit only by the flicker of multiple television screens, has over-consumed serial culture; this over-consumption constitutes his sin. Postmodern culture and consumer capitalism have already been "written" on this man's body.[1] Doe's intertextual and allusive work uses the fat man's body to replace and rewrite Warhol's silk-screened canvas. The serial crime hammered out on this fleshly canvas as an antidote to serial culture renders visible the way in which social processes of production, reproduction, and over-production can be incorporated and internalized. In Doe's serial-crime-culture, the meeting of body and the Warhol intertext is explosive.

Just as it is crucial to recognize the references to cultural history that the detectives miss, it is also crucial to realize that Doe's horrific spectacles of "sinful" bodies are intended to reflect back to us the

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[1] Jane Caputi makes an analogous argument when she explains that the cannibalistic motif at the core of serial killer narratives like Silence of the Lambs operates as a metaphor for consumerism: "A corporate consumerist society is inherently ravenous, devouring natural resources and ever insatiable for new mass-produced goods. Perhaps [the cannibalist serial killers] so grip the collective imagination in part because they mirror gluttonous American incorporation of the land and resources (bodies of others)..." (105).

inanity of capitalist modes of production. As a twisted form of artistic creation, Doe's tableaux are, like Warhol's, cultural products, produced, exchanged, and valued within complex systems of assigned meanings. If Warhol's techniques play with the idea of the machine to counter the inherited notions that art must be original, Doe's techniques are more nostalgic.[1] The sinners must each labour, under Doe's supervision, to produce the scene of their own death. For example, the glutton eats himself to death, the greedy man carves a pound of flesh from his own body, and the vain woman is forced to choose between calling for help with a phone glued to her hand but living with her disfigurement, or swallowing the pills glued to her other hand to end her own life. The paradox that the killer's killings are always mediated is missed by the detectives; they do not recognize that Doe's "work" is managerial. Doe supervises a labouring body, whose labour produces a body -

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[1] See Jameson's discussion of nostalgia in "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," where he describes it as an "alarming and pathological symptom of a society that has become incapable of dealing with time and history" (117).

a corpse.[45] The labouring body in these scenes has no intrinsic value; value lies only in the product of its labour. Doe's killings in fact restore value to the bodies that labour, since as works of art, as spectacles that can enter discourse and representation, reproduced through photos of the crime scene, disseminated through the media, and entering popular memory, the bodies attain value that they simply do not possess while alive.[46]

If Detective Sommerset is unable to recognize crucial contemporary intertexts from the graphic arts, Brad Pitt's character, Detective Mills, betrays an overall lack of understanding of culture, of killing, of the killing of culture, and of the culture of killing. Sommerset's interpretive keys are all linked to the library and to print culture, as I have said. The younger detective Mills, in

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Francis Barker has stipulated that modernity as announced by Descartes creates two new bodies where before there was only one: on one hand is the body as "dead meat," "a *mere* residue, deprived of all significance but the truly residual nostalgia. . . for an extinguished life" while on the other hand, the body is rehabilitated as an "object of knowledge," readmitted because modernity could not develop "without the body's capacity to reproduce itself" nor "without the body's capacity to work" (Tremulous vii).

Paul Virilio, in The Art of the Motor, writes that we have "the very strong impression that the person who has stopped being alive exists more fully than when actually alive, moving around before us, producing an overabundance of images of themselves. As in James Whale's film [The Invisible Man]: invisible while alive, the invisible man becomes magnificently visible again in dying" (69-70).

contrast, is suspicious of books. He gleans no clues from the Coles' Notes to the literary masterpieces he uses for a shortcut. Like the glutton, Pitt's Detective Mills has also consumed to excess the culture of the sledgehammer. His often inappropriate quips betray the circular logic that permit cultural production and corporeal destruction to indicate one another. Trying to belittle Sommerset's scholarly analysis of Doe, Mills exclaims: "He's a nutbar. Just because the fucker has a library card doesn't make him Yoda." Later, hurtling weak insults at the considerably more articulate Doe, Mills offers: "You're no messiah, you're a movie-of-the-week, you're a fucking t-shirt at best." Star Wars, the movie-of-the-week, the t-shirt slogan: these are serial forms. Within the context of the film, they represent symptoms of the culture of the sledgehammer, and yet they demand, or rather trigger, the culture of the sledgehammer. John Doe's praxis of serial murder thus appears to us as the logical and necessary consequence of the "violence" of the production and consumption of repetitive spectacles, already present in the book culture of Dante and Milton, but fully embodied in the age of mechanical – especially photographic and cinematic – reproduction.

The body, Jameson suggested, inscribes the undersides of culture and how the undersides of culture inscribe the

body. The opening credit sequence of Fincher's Seven brilliantly suggests that violence exists not simply as represented content in our cultural history, but is at the very core of the material technologies I address here: the book, the photo and the film strip. Seven opens with a discontinuous montage of images of bookmaking.[1] The production of the textual artifact is disorienting, alienating, and threatening, not simply because of the blaring soundtrack that accompanies it or the defamiliarization that results from the jagged editing and the jarring close-ups. A bandaged thumb and forefinger hold a razor blade, needle and thread, as paper and photo are cut, sewn, taped and pasted together in new combinations. This process is surgical in its precision, but paradoxically violent in intent.

The photo developing fluid swirls and resembles blood in water. The developed photos are of bodies with sharp instruments sticking out of them, mutilated and presumably dead. The more bookish element are violent too. A dark felt pen that scribbles out the eyes and faces in the

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[1] See Dolores Warwick Frese and Katherine O'Brian O'Keefe's introduction to The Body and the Book, for an analogous argument about an "approach to the intersections of the book and body reminds us that the violence of writing (where surfaces are pounded, scraped, pierced, etched, and bound to contain thoughts as texts) is not limited to the book" (Xiii).

photographs blacks out words in printed documents that seem to be taken from medical textbooks and journals. One article that begins "When you're pregnant, your sense of smell becomes capricious. . ." has the word "pregnant" blacked out. Another fragment of text reads: "Many . . . go through . . . to be . . . because of a . . . and children. The only way a . . . with his wife is by fantasizing that he is . . . a female, but rather a female . . . " The words "heterosexual," "transsexual," "fantasizing," and "intercourse" are blacked out. Minuscule shaky handwritten text crowds other bits of paper all conforming to the same theme: "sex," "god," intercourse," "homosexual," and "feminine." Clumps of hair, fetishistic reminders of the bodies captured in the photos, are also integrated into the mutant art form, at once book, photo, film, and body, (which we discover later to be one of John Doe's two thousand notebooks — "his mind poured out on paper"). In other words, the text as a material object — a technology of representation — and as an ideological apparatus — representation itself — is constituted by and through body violence, which is shown here to be inseparable from sexual violence. The cultural economy shared by the book, the photo, and the film strip is a dynamic of production, reproduction, and destruction.

This sequence only articulates in a different way what

Marshall McLuhan already declared in Understanding Media, that every medium is an extension of ourselves, of our bodies:

> The tool extends the fist, the nails, the teeth, the arm. The wheel extends the feet in rotation or sequential movement. Printing, the first complete mechanization of a handicraft, breaks up the movement of the hand into a series of discrete steps that are repeatable as the wheel is rotary. (152)

For McLuhan, serial repetition results from the prosthetic nature of media technologies; their amputation of specific body parts fragments, isolates, and reorganizes in ways that reconfigure all thought and all reality. Indeed, McLuhan observes that "repeatability is the core of the mechanical principle that has dominated our world since Gutenberg" (161). In a concise yet sweeping gesture, McLuhan links book culture to industrial machine culture to serial culture: "Gutenberg created Henry Ford and the assembly line and standardized culture" (222). Nevertheless, McLuhan does not explicitly critique the book, the assembly line, or popular and standardized culture, where Fincher's Seven demands a critical reading of the violence that accompanies

fragmentation and repetition.

Marshall McLuhan observes that the movie, which he links with the "technology of print" (285), is a "supreme expression of mechanism" which exaggerates the consequences of Gutenberg culture (291). Others besides McLuhan have addressed the way the medium of film relates to the human body. The imagery Diana Fuss uses to explain the medium of film resembles the imagery of the opening credit sequence of

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Seltzer's article on serial killers shows how the fragmentation of the body was not only produced by repetitive modes of production, but was accommodated by it. Citing Henry Ford's autobiography My Life and Work, Seltzer writes:

> The production of the model T required 7,882 distinct work operations, but, Ford observed, only twelve percent of these tasks – only 949 operations – required "strong, able-bodied, and practically physically perfect men." Of the remainder – and this is clearly what Ford saw as the central achievement of his method of production – "we found that 670 could be filled by legless men, 2,637 by one-legged men, two by armless men, 715 by one-armed men, and ten by blind men" (108-9). If from one point of view, such a fantasy projects a violent dismemberment of the natural body and an *emptying out of human agency*, from another it projects a transcendence of the natural body and the *extension of human agency through the forms of technology that supplement it*. This double-logic of technology as prosthesis (as self-extension and as self-mutilation or even self-canceling) begins to make visible the interlaced problems of the body and uncertain agency that primary mediation entails. Systematic management correlates, in the work process, serial production and the disarticulation of natural bodies, correlates dispassionate sequences of cause and effect and an eroticized violence. ("Serial Killers (1)" 99)

Fincher's film. Fuss writes:

> Film, after all, is no more than dead matter, bits and pieces of perforated celluloid slashed, spliced, and taped together. A system of "cuts" and "sutures," film borrows much of its technical vocabulary from the discourses of surgical medicine and pathology. The "cut-in," "the cut-away," the "splice," "dissecting editing" – all suggest the capabilities of filmmakers to investigate the human body with the same kind of accuracy, precision, and close scrutiny that pathologists call upon to perform human autopsies. This formal correspondence between medical pathology and film production may explain why, in narratives of serial killing, the film director has virtually become a cliche . . . . (Fuss 189)

With her references to a formal correspondence between medical pathology and film production, Fuss recalls the earlier work of Walter Benjamin. To compare filmmaking to painting, Benjamin describes the cameraman as a "surgeon" who "penetrates" and "cuts into the patient's body," in contrast to the painter-magician ("still hidden in the medical practitioner"), who "heals a sick person by the laying on of hands" (233). What is at stake in Benjamin's analogy is explicitly a question of distance, but arguably

the metaphors also raise questions about the increasing number of boundaries that increasingly mechanical media are able to transgress. According to Benjamin, "film is the art form that is in keeping with the increased threat to his life which modern man has to face. Man's need to expose himself to shock effects is his adjustment to the dangers threatening him" (250).

As I said, the credit sequence in Seven establishes a connection between violence and sexual violence, so that the cultural production and reproduction of Doe's "books" are shown to correlate with biological production, reproduction and non-production. In terms of simple body count, there are more male victims of Doe's murderous work than there are female victims, and in this, Fincher's film seems to rework the usual conventions of the serial-killer genre, predicated on subjecting female victims to male violence. However, the importance granted to the pregnancy of Detective Mill's wife, Tracy, played by Gwyneth Paltrow, frames the reproducibility of the female body in a particular relation to the undersides of culture.

Tracy's body's ability to procreate and reproduce in the context of the world she inhabits is cast as monstrous. The pregnancy is accidental, and at odds with the excess, decadence, and despair that surrounds her. Concerned with whether or not she can bring a child "into a world like

this," Detective Sommerset's counsels about abortion and about what she is to tell or not tell her husband place her (re)productive powers in opposition to those of serial killer John Doe's. Doe's tableaux reproduce, through quotation and intertextual allusion, core cultural scenes (or sins), and the death of the subjects of his representations is what guarantees that his work enter cultural memory, preserved for eternity in his books and in crime scene photographs. In marked contrast, her power to procreate and possibly then abort her fetus would necessitate only silence and forgetting. Beyond her initial meeting with Sommerset, she never does get a chance to speak of her pregnancy, nor does she experience labour. Her body and the story of her body (in particular, of her pregnancy) are appropriated by John Doe, in whose hands they become a mere prop much like the Warholesque cans of tomato sauce in the gluttony scene. The glutton depicts his own sin through his own labours. Tracy, in contrast, has not sinned, and does not produce the scene of her death. Instead, her body is used to elicit her husband's labours as he depicts his final sin – wrath. Though reproductive, this woman's body participates in the field of cultural production and cultural memory only when subject to specifically male violence, and when engendering specifically male violence.

The threat of abortion in this film works according to

a paradox. Tracy's role in the final sin/scene is to evoke two stages of the human body, one contained within the other: one body is finished and one is just beginning, one is formed and one is unformed. Creator and created, mother and child, despite their antithetical qualities, mirror one another closely. A slippage is encouraged whereby the bodies in the text become metaphors for the body of the text; mother and child become a figure for the sorts of framings, insertions, mirrorings, and unstable boundaries that characterize the hybrid text. The paradox is that if she proceeded with an abortion, her gesture, though arguably murderous, would nevertheless restore her body to its original integrity. The threat to her fetus stands as a metaphor for an aesthetics of wholeness.

The figure of the pregnant woman, as I have said, does not function within the economy of the narrative. Indeed, it would seem that the outside frame cannot sustain its inner reflection in this economy that is so concerned with stamping out unoriginality. Death — another powerful figure of transitions and in-betweenness — is imposed on the scene by the author-artist figure who controls the sledgehammer. When John Doe murders and then decapitates

the mother, the corpse of this pregnant woman powerfully asserts his own supremacy in the area of production and reproduction. More importantly, her dismembered pregnant corpse guarantees the propagation of an aesthetics of fragmentation – of serial culture.

Seven condenses our major cultural concerns: an anxiety about the permanence of the work of art in an age of simulation and mass media spectacle where new technologies compound the issues raised by merely mechanical reproduction; an anxiety about contamination between "high" and "low" forms of cultural production"; an anxiety about time and history framed here in terms of rupture versus continuity; an anxiety about, and fascination with, the human body as a site where cultural production meets

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* See Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston, in To Kill a Text, for an analysis of the "pregnant death" in Germinal in terms of an aesthetic of "the formally hybrid" that applies equally to Seven (196). See also Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, for a detailed discussion of the trope of "pregnant death" in the archaic grotesque (24-26). Bakhtin makes a crucial distinction between the archaic aesthetic and that of modern canons: "the grotesque body," he explains, "is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits. . . . This is the ever unfinished, ever creating body, the link in the chain of genetic development. . . ." (26). Within modern and postmodern canons, the trope indicates a radically different economy: the biologically reproductive body explicitly competes with other reproductive (but unproductive) technologies. It is a closed and complete unit, separated by radical otherness from the rest of the simulacral world, and its transgressions are punished.

physical reproduction; and a conviction that "textual" production is in itself an act of destruction as much as of creation, that the material technologies of writing, photography, and film-making possess a highly complex and ambivalent relationship to the living, gendered human body. At the same time, Seven also raises my own concerns about postmodernism and postmodernist discourse relating to the representation of violence, and the violence of representation. At stake is the relationship between body and text, between production and reproduction. This relationship, moreover, can be seen to be inextricably bound to what de Lauretis calls the "engendering" of violence in representation (33).

Language Crimes

> **Nothing which the outside world would consider a major crime has ever been committed in Canada. (Saul 31)**

In Canada, critical discourse on literary postmodernism has frequently been cast in terms that evade the question of violence. For instance, Janet Paterson virtually eliminates the problem from her discussion of postmodernism through terminological precision that distinguishes between

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There are notable exceptions, for instance John Moss' Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel, Terry Goldie and Virginia Harger-Grinling's editing of the Papers from the Conference on Violence in the Canadian Novel since 1960, Patricia Smart's Writing in the Father's House.

postmodernism and avant-garde. It is the avant-garde that Paterson describes as radical, subversive, and above all, violent: "Often unreadable, frequently using violent themes since it tends towards sadomasochism, the writing of the avant-garde shows strong political tendencies with a resolutely radical orientation" (Postmodernism 15). In contrast, she specifies that postmodern writing, the proper subject of her inquiry, is more linguistically experimental, more politically ambivalent, and far less violent:

> Even though it is characterized by a certain linguistic experimentation and strong self-referential tendencies, the postmodern novel, descended from modernism, which it continues and modifies, is neither unreadable nor excessively violent. Nor is it usually marked by radical political orientation; on the contrary, at the level of code and diegesis, it remains within the limits of the speakable. (15)

The consequence of this distinction is that, in her discussion of postmodernism in Hubert Aquin's Trou de mémoire, for instance, Paterson can write of the fragmentation and death/destruction of the subject (43), of anamorphosis as a figure of decomposition related to the phantasm of the dismembered body (45), of rape and murder as mere meanings evoked by antithesis and ellipse (48) – in

other words, she accurately describes multiple levels of violence of this representation, yet she skillfully manages to avoid labeling these as violence. I would argue against Paterson that the question of violence constitutes the very core of Aquin's thought and work, and I would never describe his writings as avant-garde.[1] Paterson bases her theory of the postmodern on Lyotard but along with other critics, she over-stresses the aspect of play that Lyotard identifies in the postmodern mode of legitimizing knowledge, and ignores the combative element that Lyotard also brings forward.

Indeed, the first principle that underlies Lyotard's method in La Condition postmoderne has to do with the double meaning of the word "agonistique" as battle and as play. Lyotard stresses: "c'est que parler est combattre, au sens de jouer, et que les actes de langage relèvent d'une agonistique générale" (23). There is pleasure in the

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[1] The "Présentation" to the Bibliothèque Québécoise critical edition of Trou de mémoire edited by Janet Paterson and Marilyn Randall speaks marginally of the text's violence but in the context of a feminist approach to the text (Patricia Smart's in particular is noted) that tends to place "un jugement sévère sur la représentation de la femme et la violence qui lui est faite dans Trou de mémoire" (xxviii).

[2] This is not substantially different from the thesis postulated by Northrop Frye in the "Conclusion to the Literary History of Canada": "To use words, for any other purpose than straight description or command, is a form of play, a manifestation of *homo ludens*. But there are two forms of play, the contest and the construct" (546-7).

"harassing" work of language ("le travail de harcèlement de la langue") that literature and popular speech effect, as there is, I add, pleasure in the language of harassment. These pleasures, Lyotard argues, are due in part to the sheer joy of invention, but also in part to a feeling of success wrenched from an adversary in a linguistic battle ("un sentiment de succès, arraché à un adversaire au moins" (23)). The adversary here is accepted language and connotation ("la langue établie, la connotation"), and the image here is of language, especially standardized language, as a battlefield and a playing field (23). Lyotard's second principle links his "agonistique langagière" (23) to the social. Playing on the multiple meanings of "coup" as a move in a game, a violent blow, and a moment of success, Lyotard continues: "c'est que le lien observable est fait de 'coups' de langage" (24). From this reading of Lyotard emerges an alternative sense of postmodernism as a "double-voiced discourse" (Jencks 6), in which the possibility of violence always subtends the possibility of play, in which pleasure is always potentially linked to conquest, and in which language games and language battles are inseparable from the social.

If Janet Paterson elides the question of violence in her discussion of postmodern literature in Québec, Robert Kroetsch pays close attention to this question in his

discussion of postmodern literature in English-Canada. Kroetsch's emphasis, like Paterson's, is on the game aspect of language; violence becomes a metaphor for linguistic play, for the "promise of renewal by destruction" (104). His essay, "The Exploding Porcupine" in Lovely Treachery of Words, begins by addressing actual body violence, but rapidly the physical recedes behind the textual, the content recedes behind the container, so that by the third paragraph, he can proudly claim that "in our most ambitious writing, we do violence to form" (109). This textual violence done to form is framed in distinctly sexual terms: "Behind the noun, violence, is the verb, to violate. We want to penetrate the word, penetrate the image, and uncover story" (109). Word, image, and story are perceived here as a feminized vessel, as a container that must be penetrated, violated, and broken into before it can engender new (re)productions, new representations. And, evoking Ihab Hassan's essay "The Literature of Silence" from The Postmodern Turn, Kroetsch argues that "the ultimate violence that might be done to story is silence" (109). Silence too is feminized as absence, as lack, which, in keeping with the heterosexual connotations of the pair "violent/violate"

Paradoxically, Kroetsch argues that it is "English-Canadian writing" which "has too often avoided its own violence" (108).

tends to provoke violence: "But that possibility of silence," he writes, "finally, is only a provocation into speech" (109). Deploying phallic imagery, Kroetsch continues: "Foucault tells us that 'every language erects itself vertically against death.' The erection must issue into speech; speech must issue into story" (109).

Kroetsch casts the erotics of textual production in terms of sexual reproduction, and he captures the double-meaning of Lyotard's "agonistique" as battle and as play. Considered in light of Fincher's Seven, Kroetsch not only correlates cultural and physical production and reproduction, but also reveals how destruction figures into these economies at the most fundamental level. He expresses this paradox clearly:

> The apocalypse of speech, the naming of the world's end, does not end the world; that act, precisely, insures its continuance. We, invited in as radical readers, participate in this *murdering into life*. . . (my emphasis, 111)

Here, Kroetsch raises a crucial point which Fincher's film neglects; that of the necessary complicity of the reader/spectator in the violence of representation, and the representation of violence.

This is also Linda Hutcheon's argument about postmodern

metafiction explored in The Canadian Postmodern (27), and its importance lies in its consideration of the perceiving subject within the economy of the field of cultural production. In The Politics of Postmodernism, Hutcheon may argue that unlike feminism, postmodernism lacks a "theory of agency," by which she means a theory of "positive action on a social level" (22). Yet when she describes the relationship between postmodernist texts and dominant ideology or doxa as "complicitous critique," she leaves open the possibility of a theory of readerly or spectatorial agency which implicates the consumer of postmodern culture in its very production and reproduction (9). Perhaps our complicity is precisely what constitutes our "pleasure of the text." If so, then the issue of how Lyotard's "agonistique langagière" relates to the social becomes a crucial yet entirely vexed question.

Technologies of (Re)production

> **Postmodernists think and write about aesthetics, artworks, art practices, textuality, indexicality, and death. As witness of intellectual history, the postmodern mind is paralysed by the devastations wrought by modern social and technological science. (Charles Levin 96)**

The intertwining of pleasure and pain, inherent in both concepts of serial killing and serial culture, raises some theoretical discourses about textual production in the

modern and postmodern age. In "Technology's Body: Cinematic Vision in Modernity," Mary Ann Doane addresses the relationship among the cinema, the body, and modernity, and suggests a productive way of conceiving of violence and pleasure in light of media technologies. Doane develops McLuhan's idea of technology as prosthesis, which she defines as "an addition to or supplementation of a body which is inherently lacking" (3). Yet she argues for a fundamental ambivalence in this prosthetic role; the same technology which adds to and aids the human body in the case of the cinema "assaults the spectator" (6). "Indeed," writes Doane, "the most recent theorization of the primitive cinema conceives of it . . . as a series of visual shocks which are consistent with the disruption, rapid change, and sensory assault associated with modernity" (6). Introducing the idea of the "thrill" which promises "an excitation of the body" without the threat of "breaching its integrity," Doane comments on the relationship between the medium and its message:

> One particularly effective way of titillating the spectatorial body while guaranteeing its safety is to displace the potential aggressivity of the relation between film and spectator onto the register of the signified. Hence, there is a surprising fascination in many . . . films with a

surprisingly frank and unmediated sadism.(6)

Doane suggests that the message of the cinema can be understood as the reflection and displacement of the structure and function of the medium itself.

Gender becomes an important element of Doane's analysis. She argues that the titillated and assaulted body put at risk by modernity and the prosthesis of the cinematic medium has been that of the white male (14). The message, or "content" of the "cinematic demonstration of technological prowess" has been the spectacle of the female body (15). "In other words," Doane writes,

> the figure of the woman is here defined as *excentric* to the real drama of the body being staged by and through the cinema. Such discourses indicate her marginal status in the male's epistemological confrontation with the technologies of modernity. For what is at stake in the early stages of the development of the cinema is very much the body, but it is a body which is preeminently masculine. . . . (3)

Doane's argument is fascinating because it offers a new perspective on the relationship between sadism and the cinema theorized by Laura Mulvey and others. Modernity and its prosthetic technologies of reproduction assault the male

body, and in turn, the "spectacular deployment of the female body" serves as a screen for this assault (15). The category of violated is thus doubly engendered, and this last point is crucial for a coherent feminist critique of art since the age of mechanical reproduction. Doane writes about early cinema and modernity here, not contemporary cinema and postmodernity. Nevertheless, the paradigm she outlines can be easily traced onto the contemporary cultural scene.

Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, in "Body Digest: Theses on the Disappearing Body in the Hyper-Modern Condition," argue for the death of natural and discursive body, and its rebirth in technological society as "panic body" achieving "a purely *rhetorical* existence" (ii-iii). Their "panic body" describes what I have tried to articulate in my discussion of the blurring between figures of body and text in postmodern representation (the postmodern text may figure or represent the human body, but the human body may equally figure as postmodern text). Its existence is rhetorical, but in the hyper-modern condition, rhetoric is not in opposition to reality," but rather constitutes a highly charged field marked by violence, traversed by libidinal energies, and inscribed with power:

> Panic bodies living on (their own) borrowed power;

> violent, and alternating, scenes of surplus energy and perfect inertness; existing psychologically on the edge of fantasy and psychosis; floating sign-systems of the body reexperienced in the form of its own second-order simulacra;. . . incited less by the languages of accumulation than fascinating, because catastrophic, signs of self-extermination, self-liquidation, and self-cancellation. (iii)

The Krokers continue their description of the "panic body" with an image of the body as screen: "Panic bodies: an inscribed surface onto which are projected all the grisly symptoms of culture burnout. . . " (iv).

For Mary Ann Doane, it was the spectacle of the woman's body which served as screen both disguising and revealing the white male's corporeal relationship to modernity and technologies of representation. The woman's body is singled out in the Krokers' article as well. They argue that

> women's bodies have always been postmodern because they have always been targets of a power which, inscribing the text of the flesh, seeks to make of feminine identity something interpellated by ideology, constituted by language, and the site of a 'dissociated ego.' (v-vi)

The discussion of woman's (postmodern) body continues with an image that uncannily brings me back to Seven and its link

between serial killing as cultural production:

> women's bodies have always been forced to dwell in the dark infinity of the limit and transgression *as serial signs*: exchangeable and reversible poles in a power field that can be hyper-subjective because it is also hyper-simulational. (my emphasis vi)

This image of woman's body as serial sign – a sign that is endlessly repeated and reproduced through the power field of culture but whose content is reversible and exchangeable, a sign produced with ambiguous and ambivalent value within a (rhetorical, but very real) economy of representation – is analogous to Lea Melandri's observation that woman is "an equivalent more universal than money," but is far more appropriate to the postmodern scene (cited in de Lauretis 45). If Melandri's observation captures the fact that women's bodies acquire value and are exchanged *as signs*, the Krokers' designation evokes the repetitive, formulaic, yet arbitrary aspect of the production, reproduction, and exchange of these gendered signs in mass culture, and reminds us (if we make the association with serial killing), that the field of cultural production is often a battle ground where language games have high stakes for men and women.

Emblazoned Corpses/Corpuses

> **So there is a natural, serial link between reading, writing, action and destruction. (Lecercle 230).**

The writings of Hubert Aquin are obsessed with the question of violence and representation. His novels, in particular, compulsively dwell on the same themes of murder, rape, suicide, disease, neurosis, and psychosis, and the body (both male and female) for Aquin is perpetually a disruptive presence, a scene of disruption. I remain fascinated with his obsessions, but his work is pertinent here also because of the way he alludes to and incorporates (Jameson would say "cannibalizes" (Postmodernism 18)) mass culture, in particular, the police novel, as much as high culture. Moreover, Aquin's writings tend to proliferate representations of technologies of representation: books, manuscripts, film scripts, diaries, letters, films, photos, art works, theatre sets, television sets, and typewriters fill his works. Hutcheon and Paterson among many others have explained this phenomenon of multiplying the signifiers associated with acts of "creating" as belonging to the narcissistic and autoreflexive characteristic of the postmodern novel. Certainly these explanations are not inaccurate, but they do not make an explicit link between the representation of violence to the violence of

representation. As I have suggested, in the postmodern scene, the body and the text, acts of reproduction and acts of cultural production, form an indissoluble nexus that is inextricably bound with the question of violence, a violence that is at least doubly (if not multiply) en-gendered.

Hubert Aquin's Trou de mémoire is not usually read in terms of the genre-fiction of serial killing, since in this novel we do not find serial killing *per se*. The novel does, however, spiral around an act of violence and a corpse, as it tells of the murder of an English-Canadian woman named Joan by her French Canadian revolutionary lover, Pierre X. Magnant. Likened to the anamorphic cranium visible and yet invisible at the centre of Hans Holbein's painting The Ambassadors, Joan's corpse constitutes the core of the novel, and its disfigured form animates the body of this text:

> Blason mortuaire au centre du livre. . . . Elle anime tout: elle est le foyer invérifiable d'un récit qui ne fait que désintégrer autour de sa dépouille. Le livre n'est qu'une accumulation de vanités qui ne sont que des masques multiples de l'atroce vérité qu'un simple déplacement de point de vue permet de désigner comme meurtre. (165)

Like Holbein's cranium, like the sins/scenes represented by

John Doe in Seven, Joan's distorted body becomes a potent symbol of the paradoxical logic of corporeal destruction that accompanies the production and reproduction of texts.

In Trou de mémoire, competing narrators and editors vie for control of a story that always slightly exceeds their grasp. Joan's corpse is what provokes and finally weaves the writings of these various narrators and editors together. Pierre X. Magnant's delirious rantings in "perspective violente" are bound together with his attempts to forget the murder and to forget Joan, whose body now haunts and inhabits him (157). He weaves his words like a shroud with which to cover up her always nude body which permeates his imagination:

> Je me vois écrire ce que j'écris, conscient à l'extrême de recouvrir le corps de Joan d'une grande pièce de toile damassée d'hyperboles et de syncopes: j'improvise un véritable tissu d'art, mot à mot, afin de vêtir celle qui est nue, mais morte. . . (57).

And if he writes to shroud her corpse, he also writes to silence it, for he fears that her "eloquent" naked body might "speak" the details of his crime (28). Paradoxically, his writings continually uncover Joan's body through highly charged erotic descriptions of her white skin, her neck, her thighs, her lab coat, just as they compulsively confess to

the crime that killed her. He repeatedly apologizes: "Joan, mon amour, je t'ai tuée; je t'ai tuée, je t'ai tuée, je t'ai tuée. . ." (25).

Pierre X. Magnant establishes a causal relationship between Joan's murdered body and his written texts. But he extends this explicit connection between murdered body and text in a way that more resembles the praxis of serial killing depicted in Seven. For Aquin's protagonist/ narrator, Pierre X. Magnant, as for John Doe in Seven, murder itself is a form of textual production. Pierre X Magnant refers to the "indelible" traces he leaves on the pure body of the beautiful English woman (55); her death is described as a "préface" (60). An editor's note points out that this narrator has a propensity to "établir des correspondances entre son récit et le corps de Joan," and thus reveals "une volonté explicite de faire un produit littéraire" (55). In other words, the violence done to Joan's body, like that done to the victims of the serial killer in Seven, is a form of cultural production. Performative, and transformative, murder is cast as a creative endeavor that ensures that the human body enters representation and becomes a work of art.

Detective Sommerset's canonical meanderings in Seven situate John Doe's murderous art firmly within a coherent genealogy of body-violence in culture that hearkens back to

Dante, Shakespeare and Milton. Pierre X. Magnant in Trou de mémoire traces the genealogy of his "work" through to Arthur Conan Doyle's fictional character, Sherlock Holmes — inventor of the perfect crime: "Voilà l'ancêtre victorien dont je voudrais tirer ma généalogie coloniale et mon héritage morbide" (90). All novels are police novels, claims Pierre X. Magnant, drawing an explicit analogy between works of high culture and serial forms: "c'est l'évidence même et je n'y peux rien." (90). The reason for his claim is astute. The police novels, which he has consumed extensively (he remarks: "Dieu sait combien j'en ai avalé derrière des comptoirs encombrés d'antihistaminiques et de gelées vaginales!") express "une croyance obscure en la vitalité des morts" (90). In other words, this serial form recognizes the productive potential of violence against bodies inherent in all cultural production. The bold argument is that the police novel is archetypal of all literature in general. By focusing on Sherlock Holmes and the genre of the police novel, Pierre X. Magnant suggests a new way of understanding literary history through violence that is no less radical than the genealogy of violence enacted in Seven. Magnant remarks:

This image of swallowing and consuming repeats the cultural paradigm articulated by Réjean Ducharme and Jean-Claude Lauzon.

> On a tort d'enseigner l'histoire de la littérature selon une chronologie douteuse: elle commence au crime parfait, de la même façon que l'investigation délirante de Sherlock Holmes débute immanquablement à partir d'un cadavre. (90)

The corpus that is constructed and studied in literary history thus finds its origins and foundations in corpses. In Trou de mémoire, as in Seven, the violated and dismembered body animates and generates the texts that literary history remembers.

Continuing to invert literary historical chronology in the same way that Lyotard does in his essay "Answering the Question," Pierre X. Magnant explains: "Si l'on tente de comprendre Dante sans avoir mesuré le rôle de Sherlock Holmes et son influence incantatoire, on fait fausse route. On invertit les séquences d'un film linéaire dont le centre repose dans le crime, acte central qui, paradoxalement, une fois perpétré, agit sur une seconde chaîne de dérivés" (90). The mixed metaphor which describes literary history as a film shown backwards violates a logic of causality and conventions of chronology, but through this violation, Aquin underlines the principles of mechanical reproducibility at the core of both technologies. For Walter Benjamin, the book retains an "aura" because in it, mechanical

reproduction remains an external condition, "while mechanical reproduction is inherent in the very technique of film production" (244). Aquin's inverted history reveals in contrast that the serial production that typifies industrial culture can be identified in earlier practices, as can serial violence. Indeed, body violence and text should not be conceived of separately. Magnant argues that crime is a transcendental value: "Chimie au second degré, l'obsession du crime est un transcendental: ce qui est fini transforme, et le cadavre, impliqué dans le processus mortuaire, devient le stupéfiant qui permet l'idéation euphorique" (90). Cadavers, like the serial texts they generate, emulate, and transform, are the narcotic which permits the euphoric pleasure of the text.

In Trou de mémoire, Joan's cadaver engenders story and history, and is itself a textual battlefield where language games are fought between adversaries. The question of who or what is Joan, and what her body signifies or means, takes on an urgency when the female editor RR., whose notes have been supplementing and correcting the editor's notes, intervenes in the text and confesses that all that we have been reading is an elaborate screen for the "real" truth. RR. claims that Pierre X. Magnant is an invented fictional narrator, and that the story he tells is a fictionalization of her real story of failed love: "Pierre X. Magnant dans la

réalité . . . c'est moi. . . je projetais en lui la masse confuse de mes vrais désirs!" (140-1). Simply put, Joan, whose corpse like the anamorphic cranium in Holbein's painting animates Pierre X. Magnant's narration, is now "Joan" in quotation marks, a "real" woman who is purported to be the object of RR.'s lesbian desires. RR.'s "Joan," however is not a microbiologist, nor is she dead. Rather, she works in the theatre creating special optical effects, and she has left RR: "'Joan — je veux dire: celle que j'ai aimée et dont la réalité m'obsède — est la spécialiste du trompe-d'oeil au théâtre; véritable technicienne de l'hallucination . . ." (146). In this version of events, it is "Joan" who is killing (and certainly not killed): "Tu me tues mon amour, et tu te débarasse de moi quand tu veux," laments RR. (149).

"Joan"'s passion for theatrical special effects is grounded, we are told, in a detailed knowledge of the Renaissance practice of anamorphosis: "'Joan' a toujours été en extase devant les jeux anamorphiques des anciens et elle a, pour sa part, utilisé le procédé du 'verxierbild' (tableau à secret) de Schön, célèbre graveur de Nuremberg et disciple de Dürer" (146). Renewing these ancient practices, "Joan" according to RR consciously multiplies perspectives, makes apparent *invisible* images, and relies on secret

techniques of decomposition (146-7). Her inimitable genius for simulation, RR accuses, makes her an agent of death and destruction rather than merely a victim and emblem of it as Pierre X Magnan's narrative version would suggest. Indeed, RR claims for herself the symbol of the grinning cranium in Holbein's painting, ensuring that the symbolic economy animated by signs of death and other fatal strategies circulates freely:

> Je me sens . . . comme une effigie distordue qui, jamais regardée obliquement et selon le bon angle, reste infiniment une image défaite. Tableau secret aux lignes rallongées avec extravagance et non sans cruauté de ta part, je m'étire lamentablement dans une perspective que tu as préméditée et comme une anamorphose que nul regard amoureux ne rendra à une forme raccourcie. . . . Tableau secret, je m'allonge démesurément sur une feuille bi-dimensionnelle qui, par un effet d'optique, m'enserre comme un linceul indéchiffré: nature morte ("still life", dirais-tu...), je suis une anamorphose de ma propre mort et de l'ennui. (147)

Applied here to describe the distortions of the lover's gaze, the shifting realm of anamorphosis becomes an apt structuring metaphor to describe the multiple shifts in

perspective required to decipher the distortions and fragmentations of "reality" the text as a whole demands.

The technique of anamorphosis, according to Jurgis Baltrušaitis whom Aquin cites and distorts, was established in the fifteenth and sixteenth century as a technical curiosity that carried with it a poetics of abstraction, a powerful mechanism of optical illusion, and a philosophy of factitious reality (5). Janet Paterson and Marilyn Randall have argued rightly that Holbein's anamorphosis functions as a metaphor for the text as well as for the act of reading: "Pour qu'il y ait anamorphose," they explain, "il faut que le spectateur participe activement à la formation du 'drame en deux actes'" ("Présentation" XLI). With this mixed metaphor, they recall Baltrušaitis' explanation that Holbein conceived of The Ambassadors painting as a theatre with changes of scene and decor, in a

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Arthur Kroker and Michael Weinstein in Data Trash, calls anamorphosis a "genuinely outlaw perspective": "Refusing the fixed aesthetic of foreground and background, and rejecting the reduction of art to a representational function, anamorphosis worked a more complex double game: a fantastic distortion of perspective, and the disappearance of representation into the non-space of illusion. This was an artistic gesture that functioned to destroy reality: transferring the ideology of fixed localized perspective into a seductive game of illusion. Anamorphosis is about the 'perverted image.'" (49)

For an analysis of Aquin's relationship to Jurgis Baltrusaitis' comments on Holbein's painting, see Marilyn Randall, Le Contexte littéraire (216). See also Winfried Siemerling, Discoveries of the Other (95-105).

dramatic spectacle (104). The spectator of the painting perceives initially the scene of human splendour where the two Ambassadors are surrounded by the instruments of Renaissance learning and power. As the spectator moves to another room, the troubling figure in the bottom of the painting becomes decipherable and imposes on the spectacle the sign of death and endings. Thus anamorphosis is also a metaphor for hybrid texts: the static representation demands a dynamic, dual reading strategy and, under the sign of distortion and death, becomes performative.

The sign of the dead body in Holbein and Aquin's work demands a cautiously dual reading strategy. The form of violence can be seen at the centre of both fields of representation, but its outlines are clearly visible only from particular perspectives. As a reader or viewer, it is crucial, then, to strive for a certain analytic mobility that hovers on edges, that pursues the logic of both/and instead of either/or. The fundamental doubleness that Trou de mémoire requires of its reading subjects very much resembles Hutcheon's analysis of the functions of irony (Irony's Edge 47). Likening Hutcheon's diagram, with its dual polarities, to an exhibit of static electricity, Peter Hagen draws from imagery that is simultaneously technological and sexual when he says that neither the positive nor the negative poles are to be privileged over

each other: "The tension between them is what counts as well as the point along the scale at which the arc 'discharges'" (48).

The shifts of Aquin's text are vexing. If the explicit representation of male violence against women's bodies becomes a screen for supposedly desired (but not practiced) female violence against female bodies, the question of who en-genders representations of violence seems to lose all focus. Nevertheless, Aquin here points to what I feel is the crux of the problem of postmodern theories – when everything recedes into the realm of representation, we do not know how to deal with the relationship between real, living bodies, and texts. The gendered battle over authorship between RR. and Pierre X. Magnant in Trou de mémoire makes it clear that it does matter, but in a most complicated way. The story of violence generated around the body of Joan or "Joan" takes on a different valence when we consider it to have been authored by a man or a woman. When the nameless editor steps back in to violently counter RR.'s claims of authorship, a battle of words begins over Joan's body whose stakes are precisely about who authors the text of violence against bodies in our culture, who violates the texts of authority, and what authority is accorded their violence.

Aquin's obsessive focus on technologies of

representation in this novel, that is to acts of typing, writing, recopying, erasing, editing, cutting, and inserting, draws attention to the battle waged over the production and reproduction of texts just as the obsessive figuration of Joan's damaged body draws attention to the violence waged within these texts. The text is as fragmented as Joan's body, and its integrity is similarly violated. The experience of reading Trou de mémoire, moreover, is a disruptive one. Aquin explains that his goal in this novel is to rape the reader: "j'admets que j'essaie d'étreindre le lecteur littéralement dans Trou de mémoire, ou de le violer même, à la limite, et de l'agresser pour ensuite le relâcher et le reprendre indéfiniment" (248). When read back against the novel, this image of a violated and raped reader raises the question of the pleasure of the text though this connection itself raises many questions and problems. For indeed, the "trou de mémoire" that the title refers to is RR's forgetting of her rape by Pierre X. Magnant (the same figure who murdered her sister Joan). As Olympe Ghezzo-Quénum uses various pharamceuticals to help RR reconstruct the real story of this event, the question that haunts him has to do with whether she enjoyed this violation: "Et a-t-elle éprouvé le minimum de plaisir. . . ma question me fait mal et me rend malade . . . je ne puisse en déduire qu'elle a certainement trouvé son plaisir à être

violée par P.X. Magnant" (197). While Olympe finds it difficult to deduce that RR found pleasure in her violation, he finds it equally difficult not to deduce this horrifying conclusion from the orgasmic scenes she reenacts every night in her sleep. By suggesting that the text of violence and violation is a text of pleasure – in content and in form – Aquin draws the reader who consumes this story into full complicity with the violence of representation and the representation of violence.[5]

Through this image of rape and violence, Aquin also links cultural production and creation to reproduction and procreation, for we discover at the end of the novel that RR is pregnant from her rape by Pierre X. Magnant. The problem this poses is clear: reproduction is violence, and beyond this, violence reproduces. Where Gwyneth Paltrow's character Tracy in Seven was silenced and cut off from story and cultural memory because of her supposedly monstrous ability to reproduce, RR has the last word in Trou de mémoire. As the last living editor, pregnant with the child of arch-destroyer Pierre X. Magnant, RR's words have the power to articulate the final version of events, just as

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[5] See Marcel Cornis-Pop, "Postmodernism Beyond Self-Reflection: Radical Mimesis in Recent Fiction," for a commentary on the function of rape in postmodern literature: "Rape . . . is a lucrative institution that has turned – to paraphrase Baudrillard – an art of seduction (based on secrecy and withholding) into a frenzied production" (145).

they have the power to name the child that she is carrying. RR's act of naming the child indicates that she takes her reproductive labour seriously, for the names she chooses literally reproduce the key figures in the story she has just brought to some closure. If male, the child will be named after his genitor, Pierre X. Magnant, and if female, the child will be called Joan X. Magnant. Already we begin to imagine the repetitive stories and histories that will be engendered with these names.

Through its insistence on perceiving violence against the body at the core of all acts of cultural production whether they be located in high or mass serial culture, through its complex negotiation between the question of gender and these violated bodies, through its identification of the pleasure of this violence, through its assertion of the complicity of the consumer/reader of the material artifacts of cultural production in the reproduction of violence, and through its emphasis on the role of the technologies of cultural (re)production in the literal assault of culture on the subject, Trou de mémoire, like Seven, offers a highly relevant meditation on the question of violence as it relates to gendered bodies in postmodern texts.

Cut (Up)

Being analytical, language can come to grips

with the body only if it cuts it up . . .
(Barthes, Sade Fourier Loyola 127)

This chapter began with the question of violence in contemporary life and art, a question that is as central as it is unanswerable. The violence in representation, Fincher's and Aquin's texts reveal, is always bound with the violence of representation. Textual production and its practices of cutting, scraping elicits textual consumption, figured in these texts as penetration and violation. Always obvious, and yet curiously invisible beyond the calm exterior of the text, violence and the repetitions of seriality demand a double reading strategy attuned to the gaps and overlaps between means, methods, and message.

Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse observe in their introduction to The Violence of Representation: Literature and the History of Violence that "to regard certain practices as violent is never to see them just as they are. It is always to take up a position for or against them. . ." (9). Yet Jameson's statement that the underside of culture is blood, torture, death, and terror and McLuhan and Doane's theories about media as prosthesis which supplement but fragment and disrupt the human body could suggest that to regard certain practices as violent is precisely to see them (within a dual optic) just as they are.

> **. . . the "inner eye" of postmodern power opens onto a continent of simulated experience: here, power is, in fact, always put into play through a relentless exteriorization of the faculties of the body; and through a surrealistic resymbolization of the text of lived experience. Here there is no paradise of rotting flesh and no prospect of new disease with the morning sun. (Kroker and Cook, 74)**

Chapter Four

The Body De/Composed

"No Paradise of Rotting Flesh": Hubert Aquin's Neige noire

According to W.J.T Mitchell, we are in the midst of what he terms a "pictorial turn"(13). Mitchell concedes that

> . . . in what is often characterized as an age of "spectacle (Guy Debord), "surveillance" (Foucault) and all-pervasive image-making, we still do not know exactly what pictures are, what their relation to language is, how they operate on observers and on the world, how their history is to be understood, and what is to be done with or about them. (13)

The symptoms of this "turn" are many, but are all motivated by an "anxiety" driven by a need to "defend 'our speech' against 'the visual'" (13). Mitchell's choice of language is telling: certainly, he suggests with the word "defense"

that the language games of postmodernity hover on the edge of battle, particularly when they involve words and images.

David Fincher's film Seven and Hubert Aquin's Trou de mémoire both disclose that within postmodern culture there is an intimate rapport between graphic violence and what Mark Seltzer calls "the graphomanias of the Second Industrial Revolution," specifically the technologies of "registration, recording, and reproduction" (Serial Killers 7). Serial culture and serial crime meet in "that whole landscape of advertising and motels . . . of the late show and Grade-B Hollywood film . . ." where repetition, reproduction and destruction become indissociable (Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" 112). Recalling once again Jameson's statement that "the underside of culture is blood, torture, death, terror," I turn now to another violent, haunting text by Hubert Aquin (Postmodernism 5). Neige noire is a highly inflected and self-reflexive novel that cross-fertilizes the written word with the moving image. The combination is explosive, and Aquin fully exploits the logical and formal paradoxes of this hybridization. Neige noire takes the form of a film scenario, with directions about camera angles and movement,

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See Allen Thiher, Words in Reflection, for an account of language games in postmodern fiction.

soundtrack, and editing, which circles around the television filming and broadcast of a theatrical production of the play Hamlet. Four distinct technologies of representation – theatric, televisual, cinematic, and literary – compete and cooperate in a convoluted *mise en abyme* to contribute to an erudite commentary on the cultural economy of postmodernity.[1] In Neige noire, the battlefield, while investigating "exactly what pictures are, what their relation to language is," pushes anxiety to its limits (Mitchell 13).

Postmodern Novels and the Condition of Film

Sherrill Grace situates Neige noire in a corpus of postmodern novels that all employ cinematic strategies including Cohen's Beautiful Losers, and Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow (100). Her reading proceeds from the imperative that an understanding of the film analogy in Aquin's text "raises crucial questions about the nature of postmodern art in general" (90). She asks, albeit rhetorically, "is the novel now aspiring to the condition of film?" (90). Her

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[1] Caroline Bayard summarizes the debate on whether or not Aquin's Neige noire can be considered postmodern: ". . . Aquin, postmoderne ou pas? Oui nous assurent Patricia Smart (268,269,270, 274, 287) et Janet Patterson, certainement pas répond André Baudet (45-46) pour qui l'auteur de Neige noire est le père de la modernité québécoise, celui qui nous a faussé compagnie lorsque les choses ont commencé à mal tourner pour ladite modernité. . ." (24).

contextualization of these general questions about postmodern art and hybrid forms is highly relevant to my thesis; her exploration of possible answers, however, follows paths that hint at but do not fully articulate the explosive potentials of hybridizations of the media within texts.

Grace's analysis traces a postmodernism that relies heavily on media-crossings and quotation, citation, and transformation of past forms. She focuses her intertextual reading on one text in particular referred to twice in Aquin's novel, Robert Weine's expressionist film of 1919, The Cabinet of Dr Caligari, "a tale of violence and murder told by one kind of artist/madman about another" (96). Aquin's work, she argues, evidences similar techniques of closure, and handles subjectivity in a similar fashion, and Grace expands on these in some detail to finally situate Aquin within a "neo-expressionist variety" of postmodernism (97). Grace underlines the pornographic, perverse, and violent elements of the texts she mentions, and she comments on the highly participatory role handed to the reader/viewer of these texts who are complicit in the madness and violence of the text (90). These elements, already present in Modernist Expressionism, when recapitulated in texts such as Neige noire, contribute to a self-reflexivity that is aware at all times of the "power and danger inherent in art" (96).

And yet, when Grace actually articulates what are the reasons for and the effect of the cinematic analogy that structures Aquin's postmodern novel, she shies away from a materialist or ideological understanding of the medium of the cinema, and fails to account for the pornographic, perverse, violent, and violated body she observes in both novel and film. What she says is that the film analogy "is an especially dramatic way of forcing us to question the nature of reality, our perceptions, even our sanity, and of involving us directly in events" (90). I find that she sets the stakes too low. If the "power" and "danger" of art has to do only with the "interface between art/ illusion/ madness/ dream and life/ reality/ sanity/ waking" (99) we seem to be caught in a light but sterile postmodernism too heavily indebted to a "soft" reading of Lyotard's language games.

Grace concludes her article by critiquing precisely this "lightness" inherent in postmodernist neo-expressionism by taking up Fredric Jameson's lamentation of postmodernism. In "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," Jameson traces an epistemic shift of the magnitude and scope of the one Foucault discusses in "What is an Author?" For Jameson, the shift also concerns the end of the individualism of the author, but where Foucault focussed on the "author" as a category of discourse and traces the effects of this shift

in the realm of the social, Jameson looks to the realm of the aesthetic. The "death of the subject" linked to the death of classical modernism and the birth of postmodernism, brings with it, Jameson suggests, the impossibility of stylistic innovation and the impossibility of original art. Grace takes up Jameson's distinction between "parody," which is still possible with modernist thought, and "pastiche," which appears when "parody has become impossible" (Jameson 114), and which empties previously politically potent art of its "subversive power" (124). When Aquin and other neo-expressionist writer/film makers like David Lynch recapitulate past styles, Grace argues they fall under Jameson's category of "schizophrenic pastiche" rather than parody, and consequently must be seen as "examples of neo-conservative, late capitalist culture intent upon consumption and narcissistic self-indulgence" (Grace 99). She elaborates:

> Where the great works of early modernist Expressionism challenged authority, aggressively confronted bourgeois tastes and resisted the political manipulations of twentieth-century capitalism, these neo-expressionist works arguably indulge in and pander to the consumerism of our times. (100)

Again, as with Roy's critique of Léolo, consumer culture is

vilified for its recycling of once "pure" forms. Without question, sex and violence are major commodities produced and exchanged in the contemporary cultural field, but Grace's assumption that critical content and subversive potential are emptied out through repetition is problematic.

This position is essentially incompatible with Barthes' observation, cited in chapter two, that "all institutions of language are repeating machines" (Pleasure 40). Barthes' insight is that he does not uniquely blame consumer capitalism for replicating, reproducing, and reinforcing its own logic, for this is the work of language itself. Against the homogenizing logic of Jameson and Grace which says that texts can only be either subversive or empty and self-indulgent, Barthes' model of textual duplicity can be proffered. This model, which is congruent with the idea of anamorphosis articulated in the last chapter, lends itself more productively to a reading of the textual economy of Aquin's work. Where Grace's model finally does not come to grips with the impact of the body-violence in her texts, nor with the cinematization of the novel in postmodern culture, Barthes provides a line of inquiry which lends itself to both.

Roland Barthes' Pleasure of the Text looks to the writings of the Marquis de Sade to find an image which captures the relationship between body and text, and

pleasure.[1] What he finds in the texts of de Sade, as I argue we find in the texts of Aquin, is that opposites collide to productive ends – "antipathetic codes. . . come into contact." For instance, "pornographic messages are embodied in sentences so pure they might be used as grammatical models." Barthes explains this: "As textual theory has it: the language is redistributed" (6). It is his explanation of the redistribution of language and codes that lends itself to an inquiry into hybrid forms such as Aquin's cinematic novel. Borrowing a vocabulary shared by surgeons and film makers, Barthes writes that "*such redistribution is always achieved by cutting*" (6). Cutting, he claims, creates two edges, and it is precisely this duplicity and duality that allows Barthes to avoid the either/or logical trap that Jameson, Grace, and Roy appear to fall into. On one side, writes Barthes, "an obedient, conformist, plagiarizing edge," but also "*another edge*, mobile, blank (ready to assume any contours), which is never anything but the site of its effect: the place where the

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[1] Patricia Merivale has already explored the relationship between Aquin and Barthes in "Hubert Aquin and Highbrow Pornography." It should be noted here that the filiation is rather direct; Aquin worked with Barthes on the NFB film Le Sport et les hommes in 1961.

[2] Benjamin, as discussed earlier, also exploits the ...ogy between film and surgery.

death of language is glimpsed" (6). And he stresses that "these two edges, *the compromise they bring about*, are necessary" (7).

Taking his image of the (cutting) edge to the body, Barthes likens the "pleasure of the text" to "that untenable, impossible, purely *novelistic* instant so relished by Sade's libertine when he manages to be hanged and then to cut the rope at the very moment of his orgasm, his bliss" (7). Captured in this textualized instant is a body hovering on the edge of the sterile threat of pain and death and the promise of ejaculation. It is crucial for Barthes that the scene is untenable, impossible, *novelistic*: the excesses of body, violence, and bliss are all caught as if *en abyme* within bookish representation.[*] "Whence, perhaps" writes Barthes "a means of evaluating the works of our modernity," works which always have "two edges," whose value

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[*] Elsewhere, in Sade/ Fourier/ Loyola, Barthes again emphasizes the impossibility of Sadian eroticism: "on every page of his work, Sade provides us with evidence of concerted 'irrealism': what happens in a novel by Sade is strictly fabulous, i.e. impossible; or more exactly, the impossibilities of the referent are turned into the possibilities of the discourse" (36). Even a cursory glance at the case studies cited by Mark Seltzer in Serial Killers would belie this claim. Nevertheless, Barthes' point about how we need to read writers such as Sade (and I would add Aquin) is well taken: "what he 'represents' is constantly being deformed by the meaning, and it is on the level of the meaning, not of the referent, that we should read him" (37).

proceeds from their "duplicity":

> What pleasure wants is the site of a loss, the seam, the cut, the deflation, the *dissolve* which seizes the subject in the midst of bliss. (7)

To say this another way, what pleasure wants is a kind of global suspension that is created by the contradictions of two systems meeting. Barthes reminds us to consider in Aquin's duplicitous text the interstices between the cinematic and the novelistic, between the real and the represented, between the text and its consumers, and within this space, of addressing the relationships between desire and fear, between pleasure and pain, between production, reproduction and destruction.

Paradox and Limits

The title of Neige noire introduces this as a text that explores the limits of representation – as technology, and as conceptual system. At a most fundamental level, the oxymoron of "black snow" is a self-reflexive metaphor for the different media that comprise this novel. References to "black and white," Paterson suggests, are often metaphors for writing and more generally for print culture (30). However, the curiosity of "black snow" also evokes more specifically the reversal of black and white of the lithographic plate and the photographic negative that

instigated the age of mechanical reproduction. Snow is black before it can be copied by photographic processes. Beyond the photo negative, the technologies of the cinema and television also have a sort of black snow in the "blackout" that has come to punctuate their narrative segments with silence and stasis. Thus, "Neige noire" stands as an evocative symbol of the dominant media of this century; representing at the same time words and images, stasis and motion, the title connects us to processes of media and their hybridizings.

Patricia Smart points out that the title can also be read as a symbol for a logical system based on paradox and twists of reasoning. She claims the expression is taken from one of "the great paradoxes of Greek philosophy" ("Neige noire" 97):

> Anaxagoras opposed to the idea that snow is white the argument that snow is frozen water, and that water is black, from which it follows that snow is black (Sextus Empirisus, *Pyrrh.* 1, 33) (103)

The existence of the logical form of paradox, according to Jenny Ottosson, "shows that the world in itself is contradictory." I would qualify this statement; Anaxagoras and Aquin's paradox underlines not the contradictions in the empirical world, but in representation. This is an

epistemological question. The blackness of water, like the blackness of snow, depends on subjective processes of perception. In other words, it exists in the eye of the beholder. The blackness also depends on subjective processes of signification, that is, it exists because telling makes it so. The expression of paradox in general and this paradox in particular reveals the potency of rhetoric to introduce impossibility into the realm of the possible. To argue about black snow imposes an order of hyper-reality that neither reflects, nor masks the presence or absence of a reality, but rather is its pure simulacrum. Indeed, when the novel's setting shifts to the Spitzbergen glaciers, the narrator's evocative description of the snow explicitly evokes the vexed field of the simulation, where neither pure presence nor pure absence are relevant: "Tout est mat; plus rien ne réfléchit. Le paysage est aboli. La neige engendre une image de réalité constituée autant par sa propre couleur que par l'absence même de toute couleur" (113).

Patricia Merivale mentions another possible derivation of the title of Neige noire when she relates it to "Aquin's cryptically appropriate epigraph to Point de fuite, attributed to Pythagoras: 'N'écris rien sur la neige. (*Pf*, p.7)" ("Hubert Aquin and Highbrow Pornography" 6). This

delightful admonition, expressed in the same self-contradictory rhetoric of negation as Léolo's refrain "Parce que je rêve, moi, je ne le suis pas," warns of the shifting and ephemeral surfaces of expression. To write on snow is to risk impermanence and intransience: well-marked traces easily give way to invisibility and erasure.[6]

If the title succinctly indicates a wealth of issues relating to technologies and modes of representation through the logic of the paradox, the epigraph of Neige noire provides another expression of this logic as it raises the question of ontological limits. The epigraph, attributed to Soren Kierkegaard, reads: "Je dois maintenant à la fois être et ne pas être." Explicitly echoed here is Hamlet's famous soliloquy on death and dreams where the melancholy prince asks "To be, or not to be?" (III.i. 56). A substantial shift, however, is traced in this movement from Hamlet to Kierkegaard. Aquin invites us to move from the (black or white) logic of "either/or" to the paradoxal logic of "a[illegible]." Ontological uncertainty is encouraged through the

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The Coen brothers' film Fargo plays extensively with imagery of snow, which functions self-reflexively, as in Aquin's novel screenplay, to provide a shifting surface that conceals and reveals critical (and criminal) evidence.

The epigraph speaks to Aquin's enduring concern with the painful identity of French Canada. In "The Cultural Fatigue of French Canada," Aquin writes: "French Canada, like Fontenelle on his deathbed, feels 'a certain difficulty in being'" (Purdy, Writing Quebec 41).

pondering of this existential paradox: how to at the same time be and not be? (One answer is stated in the form of a paradox: "Vivre tue" (114).)

Anthony Wall says Aquin erroneously attributes his epigraph to Kierkegaard, and instead traces the passage's origins to Hegel's Wissenschaft der Logic, where Hegel speaks about movement and time. This is Wall's translation:

> Quelque chose bouge, non point parce qu'il serait ici dans ce maintenant-ci et là bas dans un autre maintenant, mais plutôt parce que, dans un seul et unique maintenant, il doit être ici et pas ici, que, dans ce maintenant, il doit à la fois être et ne pas être. (184)

Wall reads this passage in terms of a thematics of masking. Hegel's passage applies perfectly to film, the first representational technology to represent movement as well as duration: "Quelque chose bouge." The magic of movement in the cinema is not attributable to presence in the moment of perception, "parce qu'il serait ici dans ce mainenant-ci et là bas dans un autre maintenant." Rather, in the single

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Kierkegaard in fact rejected the idealism of Hegel and turned instead towards a philosophy of the inner self caught within flux. For Kierkegaard's analysis of aesthetics, see Either/Or. For an account of the erotic economy of irony in Kierkegaard, Barthes, and Sterne, see John Vignaux Smith, A Question of Eros: Irony in Sterne, Kierkegaard and Barthes.

moment when one spectates moving pictures, there is both presence and absence, being and not being. "It must not be forgotten," writes Stephen Heath, "that a body in the cinema, in a film, is present in its absence, in the traces of an image (very different to the body in the theatre)" (188-). Heath adds that the spectator of cinema is also beholden to the same paradox of being and not being: "You too are finally present in cinema only in your absence" (Heath 188). Regardless of the intentionality behind the Hegel and Kierkegaard allusions, Neige noire does situate the question of being and not being into an ongoing dialogue about representation and the body.

The Body and the Frame

> **Postmodernism, both as cultural practice and critical discourse does seem to be characterized by an enduring obsession with the body (Longfellow 180).**

Christian Metz has referred to the cinema's paradoxical blending of the illusion of reality and presence with the radical physical absence of the object represented as its "imaginary signifier" and links cinematic practices of signification to scopophilia and other primary drives (784). Metz compares the signifier of the cinema to that of literature and the other arts by stressing that the cinematic signifier is always already a reduplication: in the cinema, "the perceived is not really the object, it is its shade, its phantom, its double, its *replica* in a new kind of mirror. It will be said that literature, after all, is itself only made of replicas (written words presenting absent objects). But at least it does not present them to us with all the really perceived detail that the screen does. . ." (785).

The narrative of Neige noire begins with a heat wave in Montréal that provides a pretext to introduce the human body as the overwhelming focus of this text. The reader is invited in the first section to move from a novelistic mode of narration and the black and white of printed words on the page into an imagistic realm evocative of the techniques of the cinema through a voyeuristic contemplation of bodies:

> Montréal ressemble à une vaste fournaise à claire-voie: les fenêtres des appartements sont béantes, offrant ainsi aux voyeurs solitaires d'innombrables contre-plongées. Épaules nues, dos exposés au soleil, cuisses ouvertes, visages enduits de lotion de bronzage, ventres blancs, autant de composantes d'images vertigineuses et allusives! (11)

The body observed as though through cinematic "contre-plongées" is fragmented into erogenous zones and erotic parts. In Aquin's Montréal, heat generates "fascination," which in turn slows down natural time and nearly stops movement: "La chaleur caniculaire a crée une sorte de fascination à laquelle peu de gens échappent et qui réduit le mouvement de la vie à une stase languissante" (11). Another paradox: in the midst of this description of sweltering heat, we find ourselves in the realm of the freeze-frame, the "cut, the deflation, the dissolve"

(Barthes, Pleasure 7).

As Aquin moves from this sexually charged but depersonalized urban spectacle to introduce his protagonists, he stresses that the erotic body is extremely vulnerable. To see is to penetrate. Outside, in Montréal, the gaze of the solitary voyeur is not impeded by window or clothing. Inside the walls of their apartment, Sylvie sleeps through the hot night naked and dripping wet with her hand placed on the top of her thigh, resting at the most "vulnerable" part of her body "comme pour voiler l'invisible" (12). Her posture is enticing, and yet her coy gesture of veiling her parts seems to position her self-defensively, as though she were trying to resist the penetrating and voyeuristic gaze that makes vertiginous and allusive images out of bodies.

The female body is not the only body that is vulnerable in these opening pages of the novel, however. Nicolas' self-examination in the shower reveals that his penis is marked by a blueish bruise which sends him reeling with pain when he has an erection. The sight of Sylvie's nude body is

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In Ways of Seeing, John Berger summarizes the gender dynamic of the gaze in strict binary terms: ". . . *men act* and *women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at" (47). This dynamic has been picked up by film theorists. See especially Laura Mulvey, Visual and Other Pleasures; Constance Penley, The Future of An Illusion; Annette Kuhn, Women's Pictures.

agonizing for Nicolas: "Vraiment, mieux vaut ne pas regarder Sylvie qui ne porte pas d'autre vêtement sur elle que celui du sommeil. Car la moindre excitation est désastreuse. [...]" (13). If there is something vaguely threatening about being looked at, there is also something explicitly threatening about looking. The pleasures of a penetrating gaze are as dangerous for the viewer as for the object viewed.

Sylvie's body and her veiling of its vulnerable parts evokes the concept of the "invisible" (12). Nicolas's examination of his own painful parts evokes a counter concept - the "unspeakable":

> La souffrance de Nicolas le mine. Les cernes sous les yeux, la fatigue, le manque de tonus, l'infatigable découragement, cela se voit; il est donc superflu de vouloir le décrire. Et ce qui est visible à l'écran équivaut, en fin de compte, à l'indicible élocutoire. (12)

Male and female bodies thus are shown to pose distinct problems for representation, and their counter-positioning in a field marked by the co-presence of distinct technologies of reproduction introduces a crucial theme in Aquin's writing - the dialectic between seeing and saying,

between visual and verbal signifiers.[70] The challenge of representation is, in Aquin's text of excess, thus formulated (in the logic of paradox, haunted by both possibility and impossibility): to speak the unspeakable, to see the invisible, but also to visualize the unspeakable and to articulate the invisible.[71]

En Abyme

Le récit est un piège. (Marin 7)

Aquin anticipates Lyotard's challenge to "be witnesses to the unpresentable" through complex and convoluted metafictional techniques ("Answering the Question" 46). André Gide said that "'nothing sheds more light on' a narrative than its *mise en abyme*," and Janet Paterson has confirmed this (Dällenbach 55). She suggests that a study of self-representation should begin with *mise en abyme* because this technique inevitably reveals the presence of

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W.J.T. Mitchell explains: "The "differences" between images and language are not merely formal matters: they are, in practice, linked to things like the difference between the (speaking) self and the (seen) other; between telling and showing; between "hearsay" and "eyewitness" testimony; between words (heard, quoted, inscribed) and objects or actions (seen, depicted, described); between sensory channels, traditions of representation and modes of experience" (5).

It is crucial to recall Annette Kuhn's claim that the task of feminist film analysis is to "make visible the invisible" (71). See especially 67-81 of Women's Pictures for a discussion of this methodology.

other self-reflexive processes (28). To identify the *mise en abyme* of Aquin's text is not a straightforward task, however. The framing structure of the text is, as though written on snow, shifting and unstable.

Aquin writes very much within the aesthetic paradigm described by Ihab Hassan as the "fusion of forms" and the "confusion of realms," and so avoids the formal simplicity of Chinese boxes (Postmodern Turn 44). Formally, Neige noire appears to us in the form of dramatic or cinematic dialogues which are cut up with commentaries on the dialogues by a third person narrator (Jacques Pelletier says in "voix off" (22)). According to Pelletier, these commentaries ensure that "le romanesque est vraiment injecté dans un texte qui, tel quel, aurait pu effectivement n'être qu'un scénario" (22). Both (dramatic/cinematic) dialogue and the (novelistic/philosophic) commentary segments circle around the same themes and intimately mirror one another. Dällenbach describes this kind of *mise en abyme* as "fictional," and he remarks that within the form of the novel, it is virtually inevitable that one genre is included in another: "the novel must necessarily subject itself to

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See Brian McHale, Postmodernist Fiction, pp. 112-130, for an analysis of Chinese Box structures and *mises en abyme* in postmodern writing. McHale relates recursive structures to the poetics of ontology.

mise en abyme through non-novelistic works, thus giving itself a bi-generic structure" (72). What initially appears to be a case of a simple (though hybrid) duplication, where the inner sequences are connected by similarity to framing sequences that enclose them, becomes a case of aporetic or paradoxal duplication – like the mythic ouroboros, a sequence encloses the work that encloses it. In other words, in Neige noire, it is never clear which is inside and which is outside: the prose narrated sections of the text at once frame and are framed by the cinematic and theatric dialogues.

The premise that permits this paradoxal framing of the narrative is quite elegant: Nicolas, the bruised lover of Sylvie, is an actor who has just played Fortinbras in a television production of Hamlet, who wishes to become a director. To accomplish this career change, Nicolas scripts a somewhat autobiographical film scenario based on his life that begins with his acting job, traces his decision to become the author of the texts he performs, and then follows his everyday life as he writes it. His control of this frame is supreme: he is at once the author and the star of these segments. The parenthetical remarks that offer philosophical commentary on the dialogues and media in general seem to temper their controlling narcissism with an

objective and disinterested voice. However, Foucault and Beckett's question "What does it matter who is speaking" is pertinent; it seems at times that the extradiegetic narrator of the prose (outside or inside) frame might actually be intradiegetic. If the speaker of the parenthetical remarks were Nicolas, he would become both the alpha and the omega of the text, and the control of this fictional character over the production and reproduction of his narrative would be total and complete. If, in contrast, the speaker of the parenthetical remarks were another character from within the diegesis of the dialogue frame, then the authorial control of Nicolas becomes a false reflection.

The *mise en abyme* of this text does not simply conform to Dällenbach's category of "fictional." Aquin interweaves the structural duplications with thematic ones that fulfil his quest to show the invisible and say the unspeakable. A climactic scene at the culmination of the novel reveals Aquin's use of an "enunciative *mise en abyme*" that brings into focus the agent as well as the process of production itself through curious figurings of the human body (Dällenbach 75). The producers of the narrative (for as I have stressed, they may be single or multiple) as well as its receivers are made present (and visible) in the diegesis in a scene that attempts to explicate the contexts of

production and reception. In this scene, the narrator/film script writer Nicolas and his Norwegian lover Eva simply watch the television broadcast of Hamlet together in a hotel room as their bodies are entwined, without violence (179). Now Hamlet, of course, through the famous "play within the play" has become paradigmatic of *mise en abyme* techniques in their purest form (Dällenbach 12).[3] The play's rehearsal and performance at what appears to be the core of a series of frames signals a veritable deluge of self-reflexive tropes.

Film directions explain the *mise en scène* in very precise terms that establish a literal framing of the theatrical production within the television broadcast within the larger fictional narrative:

> Nicolas écarte les jambes d'Eva et les maintient dans cette position. Le cou d'Eva coincide avec le rebord du lit si bien que sa tête et sa chevelure brune pendent vers le parquet. Elle voit l'image de la télévision retournée . . . .

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[3] See Aquin's essay "Occupation: Writer" for an explanation of the Hamlet intertext that involves revolutionary politics: "To choose revolution," Aquin writes, "is to step outside of the dialogue which binds dominator and dominated; to be exact, it is to ramble. The terrorist speaks alone. Like Hamlet, the sweet prince of the rotten kingdom. . . the revolutionary chooses to be thought mad. The revolutionary breaks with the coherence of domination. . . ." (Purdy, Writing Quebec 54).

> Des cuisses ouvertes d'Eva, on appercoit l'image versicolore de la télévision, parfois entamée par le ventre d'Eva qui se gonfle ou par la tête de Nicolas en premier plan. (180)

I should not have to underline the irony that Hamlet, a play that is obsessed about the problem of women's bodies and particularly their dangerous powers of dissimulation, is framed by and appears to be born out of the open thighs of a woman who is being intimately kissed. We have here an implicit commentary on the excesses of female embodiment. These corporeal excesses, moreover, appear to transcend historical contexts. Time is out of joint; the older text of Shakespeare (adapted for television) is born out of the womb of a young, contemporary woman.

The televised performance of Hamlet becomes integrated in the sexual performance of these lovers. On the

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The text of Hamlet is translated and betrayed throughout Nicolas' sexual performances, often disturbing the gender roles of the original play. For instance, after binding and raping Linda, who plays Ophelia in the same production, Nicolas cites Ophelia's lines: "Voici du romarin, c'est pour la convenance. Ne m'oublie pas, mon amour. Et pour tes pensées, des pensées. . ." (32). Shakespeare's text reads slightly different from Nicolas' version, and the differences are relevant. In Hamlet, Ophelia's lines speak her overwhelming grief and foreshadow her suicide: "There's rosemary, that's for remembrance. Pray you, love, remember. And there is pansies, that's for thoughts." Laertes' response to her summarizes and explicates her words: "A document in madness, thoughts and remembrance fitted" (IV.v.172-174). Nicolas' lines too, are to be read as "a document in madness," but his madness is

television, Hamlet says "Je dois être cruel pour être juste." Hamlet lets out a "long strident cry," and as Nicolas approaches the "fleshy peak where the lips come together," Eva's moan continues the Prince of Denmark's (180). The cinematic apparatus has been described by Commoli and others as operating in a "frenzy of the visible." Curiously, it is within this erotically charged scene that a complex dynamic of not seeing begins to define the frenzied edges of representational systems. Just as the televised representation of the dramatic performance of Hamlet is sometimes cut off by Eva's belly or Nicolas' head, the sight of Eva and Nicolas' sexual performance is also blocked from our view in this film script. Though this scene appears to be generated through image rather than narrative, and though it introduces a system of gazes that are directed towards both spectators and spectacle, each successively interior framing device poses a new problem of invisibility. The dramatic performance of Hamlet and its frame, the television, are both in turn framed by this

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not directed inwards but outwards, and foreshadows his continued aggresssion. Substituting "convenance," or propriety, for "remembrance," Nicolas delivers these lines as a threat, demanding Linda's compliance and silence. The curious circularity of his offer of thoughts for her thoughts contributes to dizzying effect of his threat. Nicolas has appropriated the verbal performances of Linda's stage character and used them against her; Linda can only remain silent, "subjuguée, mystifiée" (32).

woman's body, and yet the interior space between her legs from which all this appears to be generated exceeds representation by any of these media. Nicolas' film directions elaborate:

> Qu'importe la précision des plans! Quand on approche de cette carpelle qui se trouve au fond de la forêt pubienne, tout ne peut être qu'allusif. Le spectateur ne saurait voir ce que Nicolas ne fait que deviner et toucher de sa langue, non plus qu'assister à un spectacle qui ne peut être donné puisque tout se passe dans la noirceur humide du ventre. (180-1)

In a felicitous slippage designed to comment on the experience of the cinematic image, her vagina becomes an obscure theatre with no show – a medium with a massage (to borrow Marshall McLuhan's own pun) but no clear message. This slippage also permits an implicit commentary on the experience of the linguistic arts; Nicolas' cunnilingus substitutes the potentially expressive orature of lips and tongues touching with inarticulate shouts and moans.

As if to further blur the boundaries between inside and outside suggested by the en-abyme framing of media within media, the positioning of our lovers changes:

> Pendant qu'elle l'écoute tout en surveillant l'écran, Nicolas, dont la verge est d'une rigidité

> intraitable, pénètre subitement Eva là même où il a murmuré, quelques instants plus tôt, des mots inaudibles. Eva, surprise, relève la tête et perd de vue les plafonds à caissons du château d'Elseneur. (182)

Such penetration promises cross-fertilization, even rapture. The pornographic text now occupies the foreground, and along with Eva, we briefly lose sight of Hamlet's Elsinore. The lovers gently reposition their bodies again, and then lie still. When Nicolas announces Fortinbras' upcoming appearance in the play, he remarks as he lies underneath Eva: "C'est une sensation bouleversante. . . comme si j'étais maintenant lié à toi par une transplantation totale et qui ne peut s'arrêter; même ma tête se gonfle de sang et mes cheveux laissent échapper des étoiles floconneuses" (184). Genital supremacy is challenged here as Nicolas' head swells and ejaculates snowy stars.

As Nicolas discusses his grafting to his lover, Hamlet again comes into focus. From the interior frame of the television, Fortinbras, played by Nicolas, recites his well-rehearsed line: "Où donc est ce spectacle" (184). (In Shakespeare's English, in Act V scene ii line 346 the line reads more simply: "Where is this sight.") This, it seems, is the question, for the other question raised by Hamlet, whether to be or not to be is already answered at the book's

outset by Kierkegaard/Hegel's paradox. The subtle translation from Shakespeare's "sight" to Aquin's "spectacle" recalls the challenges of representation faced by this hybrid, bi- (or multi-) generic text. More specifically, it recalls Guy Debord's analysis of modern life in La Société du spectacle:

> Toute la vie des sociétés dans lesquelles règnent les conditions modernes de production s'annonce comme une immense accumulation de *spectacles*. Tout ce qui était directement vécu s'est éloigné dans une représentation. (15)

A social relation among people that is mediated by images (16), Debord's spectacle inherits all the weaknesses of the Western philosophical project which sought to understand activity through "les catégories du *voir*" (23). Spectacular consumption, Debord argues, becomes in the cultural sector, in textual praxis, what it is implicitly in its totality: "*la communication de l'incommunicable*" (186).

"Où donc est ce spectacle": the question is spoken by Nicolas playing Fortinbras within the inside frame of the *en abyme* structure (in the play within the television within the screenplay that is the novel). This centrality permits it multiple addressees that radiate outwards. The spectacle that is not seen is the performance of Hamlet blocked by

Nicolas and Eva's entwined bodies. The spectacle that is not seen is the unfilmable inconceivable spectacle inside the damp blackness of Eva's belly. The spectacle that is not seen is the actual film that is yet to be made from the screenplay we are reading. As I said, invisibility defines the frenzied edges where representational systems touch each other.

In the text of the real Hamlet, (and Hamlet's Twin significantly omits these lines), Horatio answers Fortinbras' question with a promise to speak to the yet unknowing world about how these things came about: "What is it you would see? If aught of woe or wonder, cease your search" (V.ii. 347-8.) Horatio attempts to make the visual recede behind the verbal universe by drawing new matter for storytelling from the explosive cross-fertilization of the two systems, responsible for the rot in the state of Denmark. Fortinbras' final words in the real Hamlet, likewise present in Aquin's writing only as an

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This same scene, rehearsed at the very beginning of Neige noire, is translated there in much more nebulous terms. Announcing the violence in the text, but underlining its ghostly qualities, Nicolas reads Horatio's reply to Fortinbras' question: "Qu'est-ce que vous voulez voir? Un exemple de transe et d'horreur? Un spectacle d'ombres? L'ombre d'un spectacle? L'ombre d'une ombre?" (15). The "search," thus rewritten, becomes darkly specular. Later, in the televisual broadcast of the play, Hamlet borrows this imagery and applies it to himself: "Je suis semblable à l'ombre. . . . Le monde est un rêve et le rêve est un monde" (184).

absence, offer nevertheless a response that is significant for its attempt to restore the language of vision. "Where is this sight?," Fortinbras and Nicolas ask. Fortinbras concludes: "Such a sight as this becomes the field, but here shows much amiss" (V.ii. 386-7). In Neige noire, the spectacle that cannot be seen, which through its unpresentability defines the edges of representational systems, "becomes the field" and "shows much amiss."

To return to our interlaced narratives, on the television screen, the "lugubrious spectacle" of Hamlet's death unfolds, and in the hotel room, Nicolas' breathing responds perfectly to its silences (185). Hamlet's dead body is transported with solemnity, but as the crescendo builds, Aquin suddenly drops everything. The filming directions refer to Eva and Nicolas' bodies "l'un planté dans l'autre et l'un enveloppant l'autre" and the parenthetical commentary explains:

> À ce point du film, le spectateur éprouverait peut-être un brin de sécurité à voir cette séquence aller jusqu'au bout d'elle-même, à regarder la conséquence inondante de tant de caresses accumulées et la solution frénétique de cette crise. (185)

The touching of bodies and the crossing of systems should "release great new force and energy as by fission or fusion"

with a self-liquidating violence, Marshall McLuhan's theories suggest (48). However, the sight, the spectacle at the core of Aquin's text and marking the edges of its representational systems is amiss. The engulfing of the bodies by bodies, of the bodies by texts, and of these texts by other texts is suddenly interrupted by the narrator of the parenthetical commentaries: "il faut interrompre l'enlisement . . . et laisser le spectateur à son propre inassouvissement et aux instances de *habeas corpus*" (185). A body (the body?) is missing, it seems, and the spectator is left unsatiated, with a challenge — a burden of proof.

The mucousy evidence of the libidinous pleasures of this text has begun to flow in new directions:

> Au lieu de se répandre dans la tunique muqueuse d'Eva, le nectaire s'écoulera dans les voies serpigineuses de l'imagination du spectateur et remontera jusqu'aux chapiteaux invisibles de l'être. (185)

The frames of this scene are thus disrupted. An invisible "nectar" (originating in the dark theatre of a female belly) slips from the inner frame of the text through to the outer frames, and when it finally exceeds the text and reaches the "imagination of the spectator." All categories of inside and outside are disturbed. The spectator, an extra-textual and

extradiegetic figure becomes trapped *en abyme* within the interlaced levels of the diegesis, and from there, begins to ask questions that relate to originality but are themselves borrowed:

> Dès cet instant, le spectateur est, d'une façon ou d'une autre, retourné; il se demande pourquoi on l'a privé du spectacle, assez réjouissant au demeurant, du couple qui jouit au terme d'un processus peut-être long mais assez original de caresses. . . . Il y a de quoi faire exploser la relation précaire qui s'était établie entre le film et chaque spectateur.(185)

Nicolas/Fortinbras' repeated question, "Où donc est ce spectacle?," now finds a new speaker – the spectator. In the shifting world of black snows, the voyeuristic desire to see, to penetrate, and to know bodies generates unanswered interrogatives. The phrase, half borrowed from Shakespeare and half borrowed from Guy Debord, comes to link this triad of inter-, intra- and extra-textual figures (Fortinbras, Nicolas, and the spectator) in their inquiry into the limits of representation – of production and reproduction. The possibility of explosion is, however, offered teasingly. The orgasm, now desired by the spectator, has escaped the characters in the interior frame of this sequence, and so it

must be sought in other places. This anti-climax is a startling conclusion to the erotic explicitness of the scene it appears in, and serves as a reminder of a generic clash between pornography and other high cultural genres going on here that I will discuss in detail later. According to Claire Pajaczkowska,

> Scenes of ejaculation are crucial to the narrative structure of pornographic film due to their function as signifying the truthfulness of the sexual act represented – as proof – and are placed in a narrative structure that is founded on repetition alone. (73)

The diversion of one strategy of repetition into parallel strategies with different generic roots shifts the questioning about truth and proof from the physical body to larger philosophical contexts.

If sexual intercourse is a conceit used to mirror and figure the *mise en abyme* structured by the insertion of texts into texts which consequently swell up "le corps du scénario," the postponing of explosion is intriguing and can be explained in a number of contexts (237).[1] One explanation is political and relates to Aquin's preoccupation with the narrative of French Canadian history

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[1] See André Compagnon, who writes "La citation est contact, frottement, corps à corps. . . ." (31).

as one of failure. In an essay published in 1964, a full decade before Neige noire, titled "Occupation: Writer," Hubert Aquin offers a graphic image of the undersides of culture from the perspective of the author. Speaking very specifically about French Canada, Aquin explains "Now that everything around him is infected with the gangrene of uncertainty, the writer has less reason than ever to claim episcopal status or an exemption from reality or a dispensation of pain" (Writing Québec 57). Positing an intimacy between the body of the writer, his country, and his text, Aquin suggests that "Syntax, form, the meaning of words — all are subject to explosion" (57). Aquin explains:

> In a country which is blacking out, the writer who attempts to breathe life into what is killing him will . . . write. . . a work as uncertain and formally unwholesome as the one taking place in him and his country. (57)

Explosion here is an ambiguous action, at once pathological symptom and cure, death and liberation, pustule and fireworks. More importantly, it is an action possible only through paradox:

> Now in my case, if the [literary] structures are shattered by the impact of the explosion within

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This comment about a country "blacking out" can be read as another possible meaning of his paradoxical title.

> me, it is not so that they can be replaced by a literary counter-structure, but so that there will be no place left at all for a literature which, were I to give in to its charms, would express nothing but my own internalization of two centuries of domination. (52)

The explosion (of syntax, form, the meaning of words) that Aquin courts in his writing announces and mirrors the death of literature. Despite the ten year gap between this essay and the publication of Neige noire, it provides one way of grounding the uncertainty and formal unwholesomeness of the novel as well as its consistent figuring of the unhealthy body within a distinct socio-political and epistemological situation.

Another explanation for the denial of explosion (and orgasm) that concludes the scene where Nicolas and Eva watch the television broadcast of Hamlet has to do with the nature of the cultural economies Aquin wishes to figure here - economies that are undeniably libidinal, but not necessarily genital or heterosexual reproductive. In order to supplement biological reproduction with other forms of creation, Aquin, like Lauzon and even Fincher, remaps the way that figures of the body indicate larger fields of cultural generation.

The narrator of the parenthetical commentaries

explicitly discusses the framing structure of the narrative and its relation to the famous *mise en abyme* of the play within the play from Hamlet. Interestingly, he denies that there is a direct correlation between the two structural strategies. Neige noire, the scenario novel, reverses Hamlet's strategy by inserting the larger frame into the stronger frame:

> ce lecteur vient . . . de comprendre que le scénario qu'il a lu depuis le début se trouve enchâssé dans le présent commentaire et que ce commentaire explique la publication de ce qu'il enchâsse et reproduit, structuralement, le stratagème de la pièce dans la pièce, mais à l'envers: ce n'est pas une insertion du plus petit dans le plus grand, mais du plus grand dans le plus petit, ce qui évoque, généralement, une idée de resserrement.(204)

The idea of contraction and containment that this structural strategy generates, the narrator concedes, is closely related to the medium of literature. Dilation, he argues in contrast, typifies the medium of film. When literature is contained within film, or film is contained within literature, then, what happens is not exactly the fission or fusion that Marshall McLuhan described (Understanding

Media 48), nor the revolutionary explosion Aquin hoped for and feared a decade earlier, but rather something that more closely resembles digestion. The parenthetical commentator explains:

> Or le resserrement définit fort bien le procédé de l'écriture, tandis que la réalisation cinématographique implique une dilatation. À choisir entre ces deux mouvements dont l'addition répétée n'est rien moins que le principe péristaltique, on a tendance à n'élire le resserré que dans la mesure où il est dilatable, écartant d'emblée ce sur quoi ne peut s'exercer aucune action. (204)

Peristalsis, that continuous, invisible, involuntary movement inside the gut, is what permits bodies to incorporate (and excrete) other bodies. Explained this way, this organic process connects to the principles of paradox that the title and epigraph announced: it is possible to be and not be, just as it is to dilate and contract. We are still hovering on Barthes' edge, but its shape has changed: unlike the frozen moment where Sade's libertine hangs on a rope, this edge is internalized and its motion continual. In many ways, the image of peristalsis is more aptly suited to the dynamics of this text – to recall the citation from Hegel that Anthony Wall attributes the "being and not being"

epigraph, "Quelque chose bouge. . . ." (Wall 184). The "peristaltic" principles described here are certainly reminiscent of Castillo Durante's phagocytotic text discussed in the context of strategies of cultural recycling in Léolo. The difference here is that Aquin's text does not only devour and incorporate other texts, but also devours itself. Indeed, the commentator continues with the imagery of auto-incorporation: "Le scénario fait penser à une contre-sujet qui se greffe à lui, tout autant qu'il se nourrit de la réponse dont il émane" (205).

However, the movements of contraction and dilation mirror other processes as well, specifically the compression of the imagination, and the dilation of the pupil (as well as the camera shutter) (205). Connecting the structuring corporeal metaphors to the concern with invisibility that haunts this text, and punning on the double meaning of "la châsse" as a frame and as eyes, the narrator concludes of his peristaltic metaphor that "cela revient à dire que le récit ne sera totalement enchâssé que lorsque la châsse sera devenue invisible" (206). To explain that the self-reflexive embedding of narratives in one another will be complete only when the frames are invisible is productively self-contradictory. But there is a *double-entendre* here. The second meaning, regarding the invisibility of the eyes,

offers a startling way of conceiving of the aesthetic device of framing that is most often figured through specular imagery.

Perfect Crimes (Or, Freeze - Frame)

> **. . . the idea which underlies the book has never been pinned down either. That idea was the murder weapon. (Baudrillard, The Perfect Crime xi)**

Trou de mémoire spirals around a woman and a corpse, and Neige noire is no different. Although there are many questions about the insides and outsides of the frames, there is little question that Sylvie is the focus of this novel-film: "Depuis le début et pour un temps encore, Sylvie est la structure porteuse du film: tout se réfère à elle, tout se greffe sur sa peau, tout se mesure par rapport à elle" (51). Introduced in the first pages as a sleeping beauty, static and vulnerable, Sylvie's role in the scenario is intimately related to her physicality. The changing flash-back sequences depicting her earlier life as a prostitute only reaffirm the association of this character with the physical, sexual body. She is the archetype, the angel-whore, touched and untouchable, violated and inviolable. As such, she poses a number of aesthetic, epistemological, and ontological problems for the film-novel.

Film directions specify that she must be represented on

screen in great detail by the camera: "cela va constituer la première icône de Sylvie Dubuque" (50). However, such concrete details are always virtual in the unrealizable manuscript that makes up the novel. There are no images or cameras in this text, so at the level of verbal representation, what becomes iconic in the representation of Sylvie is not her framing by detailed shots. Rather, the idea of Sylvie becomes an icon. Described through analogies with the visual arts, Sylvie's physical presence is offered as a point of entry into her connotative presence. In its precise imprecision, her body becomes emblematic of every object of every gaze of everyman:

> Comment donner une idée précise de son corps? Invoquer le Titien ou Tiepolo, c'est se référer à des images fixes. Pourtant, ces points de référence ne sont pas dépourvus d'efficacité, car un halo de splendeur nimbe les femmes volants de Tiepolo. N'en est-il pas de même pour Sylvie? Somptueuse, envoûtante. . . incarnée avec une connotation de plénitude, invariable en sa force d'attraction, Sylvie est la femme-femme, le miroir de l'amour, le vaisseau creux du Snaebjørn, l'oeuvre des oeuvres.(51)

While she incarnates the connotations other artist-creators would have women carry, her body also reflects on itself,

almost tautologically. A woman-woman, the work of works, the mirror of love – she is a "sight" in the way John Berger explains (47).

Indeed, Sylvie becomes a mirror for the spectator-reader who has been increasingly assigned the position of voyeur. In every instance Sylvie appears, the texts consciously frames her as an object of sight. Her eyes, moreover, become the focus of our attention. A thin teary film covers or masks them, and this, the narrator explains, lends her realness, as well as a tragic character (39). Teary eyes do not see outside of themselves, and the narrator explains that Sylvie's eyes are always humid. Her gaze, then, is limited. She is surveyed by herself, and by others, but at no times does she fully become a surveyor. For instance, on the plane to their honeymoon destination, Sylvie surveys the other passengers only to see whether they are looking at her as she slips her hands into Nicolas' pants (39). When the narrator specifies that "Son regard, plus encore que toutes ses autres propriétés corporelles, la résume," it is crucial to remember that her gaze is passive and inward (51). The narrator explains that "Son regard, d'une constante mobilité, est ce qui la relie le plus à l'invisible" (51). Indeed, because she is thus linked through her gaze, even more than her corporeal qualities, to

the invisible, her physicality is *sous rature* --present and absent. The "constant" mobility of Sylvie's inward gaze links her to a false temporality. Sylvie's body is captured and contemplated by the narrator in an ambiguous moment, either just after she has wept or just as she is on the verge of tears. She is static, but the glaze on her eyes is evocative of a dynamic sequence of events that is explosive. Her mobility – her dynamism and her duration – exists as a potential rather than a reality. Sylvie's eyes and gaze, then, mark her as a figure who hovers on "the violent edge" (Kroker and Cook 9) much like Sade's libertine (Barthes Pleasure 7).

The previous section elaborated how the sexual climax in the inner frame of the Shakespeare broadcast scene is frustrated and displaced. The narrative climax of this entire work, also framed in a highly complex and convoluted way, is equally vexing. The final and authoritative version of Sylvie's death is recounted in a photocopy that Eva procures from Michel Lewandowski. In this version, Sylvie is raped, mutilated, cannibalized, and left frozen at the bottom of a precipice in the snows of Spitzbergen. Sylvie

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See John Berger, p.61, for an analysis of impossible dynamism in Rubens' painting "Helene Fourment in a Fur Coat." Berger underlines the way the sexualization of Rubens' subject relies on a physical impossibility – a radical fragmenting of the body.

is murdered because of Nicolas' discovery of the identity of her lover – she has been committing incest with her father. In the economy of this novel, the violation of incest is explicitly metatextual; it is a crime against originary creation. Sylvie has earlier hinted at the possibility of a pregnancy. The risk of reproduction of a father with his daughter, who is already a copy of him, violates the cultural economies that value originality and individuality. That her murder is represented within a photocopy of a manuscript is thus highly appropriate to the alleged crime. As Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier explains, " . . . ce meurtre, double d'un texte qui en double un autre. . . . Double double donc, ou deux fois une photocopie" (46)

Whether or not Nicolas' excessive violence is a suitable punishment for this transgression, neither as jealous lover betrayed, or as a passionate artist-creator concerned with monstrous creations, a crime has been committed and recounted in a confessional autobiographical piece of writing. The crime scene is constructed as a sort of metatextual paradox. Lying frozen at the bottom of the snowy chasm, Sylvie's body would always retain the

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For an excellent analysis of the incest taboo in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Jon Stratton, The Desireable Body.

inscriptions of the violence of her killing. But the very white snow that preserves her body of evidence also conceals it from view. As Arthur Kroker and David Cook proclaim in the epigraph to this chapter: "Here, there is no paradise of rotting flesh and no prospect of new disease with the morning sun" (74). Like the anamorphic image of death in Holbein's painting, her perfect visibility is shrouded so that it remains perfectly invisible for all time. The criminal status of Sylvie's death can never be proven. Moreover, the crime is never acted on within the world of the novel. Sylvie's murder thus becomes a powerful emblem of the impotent, logically vicious circle that the representation of violence in hybrid postmodern texts elicits.

One explanation for why the crime is left unresolved that is often offered in the criticism of this text is already fleshed out by the characters, and has to do with the convoluted mirrorings of layers of reality and fiction which make truth a difficult category. Eva and Linda debate the "trueness" of the confessional account at the end of the book:

> LINDA: Eva, ce n'est qu'un scénario après tout. . . . Vous avez imaginé que Nicolas a vraiment tué sa femme. Mais les choses se sont déroulées différemment, sans doute. . . .

EVA: Nicolas m'a dit et redit que tout ce qu'il y avait dans son scénario était rigoureusement vrai. . .

LINDA: Sauf le meurtre!

EVA: Le meutre aussi. . . Sur une note de lui, j'ai lu ceci: "Sylvie mourra comme elle est morte. Ne rien modifier. . ."

LINDA: De toute façon, votre hypothèse de meurtre est invérifiable. . . (251)

The murder is framed as representation within a field of shifting and competing representations, and the only solid ground against which anything can be measured is the depthless white of the page, which provides no solid measure at all.

There is another explanation for why the crime of Sylvie's murder is unresolvable which has to do with the status of the body in the economy of this text. The demands of *habeas corpus* are that there is a body of/as evidence before legal action is taken. What makes Sylvie's murder essentially untouchable is the contradictory status of her

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Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier writes: "La violence du meurtre n'a d'égale que l'incertitude qu'il véhicule: meurtre imaginaire, certes, mais au sens où le propre de l'imaginaire serait de rendre indiscernable la démarcation du 'réel' et de 'l'imaginaire' — opération filmique s'il en est, puisque au cinéma plus forte est l'impression de réalité, plus fort le mécanisme d'illusion mis en oeuvre." (46)

physical body within representational framings. This is not an epistemological question about truth or falseness, but an ontological one about being and not being.[1] Although everything in this text refers to her, although everything is grafted to her skin, Sylvie's body is treated much the way Gertrude Stein treats Oakland, California: "There is no there there."

Sylvie herself seems to acknowledge that her body is always already fractured, fragmented, and unglued. Author-creator-filmmaker, Nicolas takes her body and makes it into an image – a virtual image conveyed through words. All his relations with her, therefore, involve a latent violence of taking apart and reconstituting. She complains to Nicolas:

> . . . d'un seul geste de ta main, tu m'as fait basculer. Tout s'est fracturé en moi. Les parcelles de mon corps se décollaient l'une de l'autre, c'est effrayant, tu sais. . . Je sentais mon ventre se lézarder à l'intérieur . . . et,

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[1] See Brian McHale, Postmodernist Fiction, for a discussion of ontology and epistemology as they apply to modernism and postmodernism, especially p. 10, and pp. 26-40.

[2] This line, often erroneously attributed to William Gibson, has come to be associated with the intangibilites of cyberspace. In a related gesture, associated with Canadian nationalism, Northrop Frye asks a question which guides his readings of Canadian literature – "where is here?" (541). His comment points to the intangibilities of Canadianness.

sous mon crâne, je pouvais assister à ma propre dissolution.(78)

Sylvie realizes that his manipulative impulses are sinister and despairing, and although she resists the image he makes of her, she also avows its power as law:

> Je ne ressemble pas à l'image que tu t'étais faite de moi. Tu dois être consterné par ce qui s'est passé. . . tu es injuste, car tu voudrais que je ressemble à la femme de ta vie. Vu sous cet angle, l'amour a quelque chose de sinistre et de désespérant. Plus on aime, plus on devient injuste, quelle étrange loi! (79)

As Nicolas writes Sylvie into his life and into his manuscript, he fabricates images of her invisibility, and he makes tangible her dissolution. Her disappearance, then, is a logical extension of her appearance. The crime exists even before she is murdered.

In The Perfect Crime, Jean Baudrillard asserts the same problem Aquin presents with Sylvie but in more general terms, namely

> the absence of things from themselves, the fact that they do not take place though they appear to do so, the fact that everything withdraws behind its own appearance and is, therefore, never identical with itself, is the material illusion of

the world. (2)

For Aquin and Baudrillard, reality has disappeared behind proliferating illusions of words and images. Within the representational field, meaning and being are continuously exchanged with non-meaning and non-being. The issue that haunts us now, as Baudrillard sees it, is "what we do with the problem of the truth or reality of this world":

> we have resolved it by technical simulation, and by creating a profusion of images where there is nothing to see. . . . So the prophecy has been fulfilled: we live in a world where the highest function of the sign is to make reality disappear and, at the same time, to mask that disappearance. (The Perfect Crime 5)

In Neige noire, it is never clear what we as complicit readers/spectators should do with the problem of the truth or reality of the violence of this text. The complicit characters, who are also readers/spectators of the same manuscript, seem to be paralyzed also. If the convoluted *mises en abyme* suggest (non) resolution through their technical simulation of competing truths, and their profusion of competing images, they do so through an ideology of disguise and concealment. The highest function of the signs in this text — the images translated into words

– that construct the physical body of Sylvie as an icon is to make her reality disappear and, at the same time, mask her disappearance. As Aquin suggests:

> À l'instar du temps, le cinéma néantise continuellement ce qu'il représente; à peine les corps nus ont-il été exhibés que déjà ils s'abolissent eux-mêmes et laissent l'écran disponible pour d'autres images. (243)

Rewriting

> **Écrire, car c'est toujours récrire, ne diffère pas de citer. . . . C'est que le modèle de la citation, du texte tout récriture, s'il fascine, effraie plus encore. Il touche à la limite où l'écriture s'abime en elle-même, dans la copie. (Compagnon 34)**

In the previous chapters, I emphasized that there was a distinct historical continuity in the violent strategies of auto-representation I discerned in my hybrid texts that was underlined by their concrete practices of repetition, quotation, and rewriting of source texts with parallel interests. It is crucial to realize that in Neige noire there is a similar continuity in representations of rupture. The murder which punishes the transgression of incest, like the murders in Fincher's Seven, is not original – it too engages reproductions of copies. The murder scene, repeated within the body of the text, itself repeats a far-reaching corpus of self-reflexive hybrid texts about the body.

Antoine Compagnon, in La Seconde main, describes the work of citation through the metaphor of cutting and pasting: "Lorsque je cite, j'excise, je mutile, je prélève" (17). Aquin seems to take his cue from this metaphor when he cites a significant film-text in the scene of Sylvie's death. Grace notes the "caligarisms" of Neige noire in the imagery of circled eyes, mirrors, and somnambulism, but she does not elaborate on Aquin's allusion to another early film clearly played out in the final murder scene – Louis Buñuel's Un chien andalou.

In Buñuel's surrealist montage, the metaphor of cinematic "cutting" is rendered literal and is directed at the organ of sight. The famous prologue sequence in this film begins with an alternating syntagm of close-ups of man sharpening a straight razor intercut with close up shots of the man in profile in front of glass doors. The camera pulls back to a medium shot that shows the man walking out the doors onto a balcony with the razor in his hand. A close-up of the man looking up is cut with a long shot of the moon being approached by clouds. The close-up of the man looking up is inserted again. Next, is a close-up shot of a woman's face staring at the spectator. A man wearing slightly different clothing appears behind her. He reaches to hold open her left eye with his left hand, while his right hand moves in front of her face as if to cut across

her eye with the razor. This is cut with another long shot of the clouds passing over the moon. Last, in an extreme close-up, an eyeball held open by a hand is sliced open with a razor blade and jelly oozes out. From the visceral reaction of horror this scene precipitates in viewers, it seems clear that the aggression of Buñuel's "cut" is directed against the viewer/voyeur whose task it is to put the pieces of this short narrative back together.[1] Indeed, Buñuel confessed that the film's "object is to provoke instinctive reactions of revulsion and attraction in the spectator" (Aranda 64).

At the risk of repeating myself, I cite Compagnon on citation again: "Lorsque je cite, j'excise, je mutile, je prélève" (17). Nicolas' reworkings of Buñuel repeats these images of mutilation and cutting twice — once as content and once as method:

> Il se place à genoux entre les deux cuisses de Sylvie. Il se penche et pose sa bouche sur la toison blonde de Sylvie. Gros plan: de sa main gauche, il écarte les grandes lèvres. On distingue le brillant d'une lame qui entre dans le vagin et touche le clitoris. Il procède à une

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[1] Linda Williams further underlines the sexual symbolism of Buñuel's scene when she suggests that the woman's split eye is a metaphor for the vagina and the razor is a substitute penis (Figures of Desire 83).

introcision. Gros plan de Sylvie, la bouche ouverte, le visage crispé par la douleur.(247)

Nicolas' actions clearly borrow from and allude to Un Chien andalou, and yet there are important innovations in his murder scene. Different parts of the body are attacked by the razor blade. Buñuel concentrates his violence on the eye to comment on how the technology of the cinema fragments and aggresses the viewer. In Aquin's Neige noire, seeing is always dangerous; the viewers and voyeurs of the text and within the text are already explicitly aggressed and violated by the forms of written and cinematic textuality they confront. Consequently, Buñuel's point has been already made in Aquin's novel. So even though Sylvie is represented by her teary inward looking gaze, when she becomes a player in a translation of Buñuel's eyeball scene, her clitoris and not her eyes becomes the locus of violence.

The attack against the vagina indicates an anxiety with

See the discussion about rape and spectatorship in Neige noire: "Le spectateur serait peut-être offusqué soudain de comprendre qu'il a tout fait pour être violé, offusqué. . ." (167).

all forms of reproduction, and all forms of pleasure. Roland Barthes writes: "What pleasure wants is the site of a loss, the seam, the cut, the deflation, the *dissolve* . . ." (Pleasure 7). Prompted by Sylvie's sexual pleasures with another, and worsened by the self-reflexivity of her illicit pleasures (she, the copy, has been intimate with the model), Nicolas' introcision produces a site of loss, a seam, a cut, a deflation (even a deflowering), and a dissolve. He thus attempts to carve out his own pleasure on the very interstices between production and destruction, pleasure and pain, desire and fear. After attacking Sylvie's vagina, Nicolas draws his razor blade across her belly button, onto her breasts. He then cuts from her lips to her ears, and draws worry lines in her forehead. Underneath her eyes, he draws pockets. He literally *writes* her body, reinscribing

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John Ellis accounts for the representations of sexual violence towards women in pornography in terms of a "punishment" for the unfathomability of female sexual pleasure; the pornographic film seeks to solve the enigma posed by women's bodies through a repetitious cataloguing of sexual activities (Kuhn, Women's Pictures 118). The pornographic film text "turns upon the object of the enquiry, the woman, and vents its (and the audience's) frustrations at the impossibility of gaining an answer to the question, by attacking her for her obstinate refusal to yield the impossible secret" (Ellis 166, cited in Kuhn 118). Read into Neige noire, Ellis' argument would hold that if the eye is the organ that beholds spectacles, the vagina is the organ that produces spectacles that cannot be beheld. Consequently, the vagina becomes the logical locus for a displacement of violence that is precipitated by an anxiety over invisibility.

its outlines, shaping it to conform to the narrative and ending he conceives of. Nicolas' violence is the violence of the author more than the filmmaker. By attacking different body parts than his source text does, Nicolas transforms Buñuel's specifically cinematic metaphor into a metaphor that addresses the interaction of cinema with the technology of the printed page. The stakes of self-reflexive tropes that are condensed in images of the body become very high.

The murder scene, of course, cites another major intertext — Shakespeare's Hamlet. Sylvie becomes Ophelia to Nicolas' Hamlet, as her death in the icy north literalizes Hamlet's curse: "If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry: be thou chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny" (III.i. 131-4). For Sylvie's body, "married" to two men, and "written" by them, there is no escape from calumny. Her too too sullied flesh returns to icy purity only once it is launched into the barren whiteness. But just as the Buñuel intertext is reworked, so are the Shakespearean intertexts translated and betrayed. In the televisual performance of Hamlet that Nicolas acts in, the curse is reworded with significant differences. The tv Hamlet warns the tv Ophelia: "Si tu te maries, je veux te donner pour dot cette malédiction: quand tu serais chaste come la glace, pure comme la neige, le

temps te souillera!" (177). What in Shakespeare is an expression of hypothesis (whether thou be chaste. . .) becomes in this instance an expression of certainty ("quand" - when thou be chaste), and what in Shakespeare is a broadly defined danger (calumny), in the translation to television performance becomes specifically associated with the ravages of time. In the televisual version, framed, as explained earlier, by the television screen as well as the spread legs of an excessive woman's body, only the chaste are sullied by the passage of time. At the bottom of the frozen chasm, frozen and blanketed in snow, Sylvie's unchaste body is thus free from the ravages of time, exempt from the paradise of rotting flesh. Punished because it is not pure as snow, her body becomes snow at the end. (And this paradox explains in other ways how it can be possible to both be and not be).

The relevance of the allusions to Hamlet in Neige noire obviously extends far beyond this connection between marriage, purity, snow and calumny enacted in the murder scene. Both texts share concerns with visibility and invisibility, with dissimulation, with murder and bloody thoughts, and both texts set these concerns in a world where time is out of joint. At stake throughout Hamlet are difficulties emerging from what Francis Barker calls an "incipient modernity" (Barker, Tremulous 24). The play as a whole negotiates a transition in the conceptualizing of

appearances as distinct from realities, of depth as distinct from surfaces, and of essential interiority as distinct from the corporeal order of the spectacle (30-1). Although the play can be coherently analyzed according to its strategies of mirrorings and doublings,* inner frames do not exactly mirror outer ones in the play world, and the gaps between them pose problems for knowing and being.

Hamlet, "The observ'd of all observers," does not know whether to trust what he sees (III.i.150). Against a world-view based on a logic of sameness regulated through copies and reflections, he vehemently asserts difference. For instance, he argues that his outward appearance is not to be confused with his interior essence:

> Seems, madam! nay it is, I know not 'seems.'
> 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
> Nor customary suits of solemn black,
> Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,
> No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
> Nor the dejected haviour of the visage,
> Together with all forms, modes, shapes of grief,
> That can denote me truly. These indeed seem,
> For they are actions that a man might play,

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* See Jean Ricardou, Le Nouveau roman, p. 49, for an analysis of Hugo's William Shakespeare that concentrates on doublings and mirrors. See also Lucien Dällenbach, The Mirror in the Text, especially part I.

> But I have that within that passes show,
> These but the trappings and the suits of woe.
> (I.ii.75-86)

He is not certain whether to trust Ophelia as a lover, whether to distrust her as Polonius' daughter, or whether to distrust her as a woman, who might be, like his mother, a dissembler unable to distinguish between a real king and a false one (Levin 28).

Now Hamlet's insistence on an essential difference between outward appearances and inner substances can be related to what Mark Seltzer would call the graphomanias of the text. What I mean is that the epistemological and ontological dilemmas posited by the thematics of insides, outsides, masks, and deceptions, correlate with concrete practices of textual production and reproduction. Hamlet, like Neige noire, is a highly self-reflexive text. I have already discussed how the play-within-the-play is a model

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Hamlet's interactions with Ophelia are all deceptive. When Hamlet withdraws his declaration of love for Ophelia in act III scene 1, she remarks that she is "the more deceived" (III.i.118). Levin refers to Mrs. Siddons' analysis of the scene: "If Hamlet did not love Ophelia, she has indeed been deceived; but since he did, and probably still does, she is deceived all the more by his denial; and he completes his multiple deception by convincing her that he has gone mad. Yet he too is deceived, if he thinks of her as a party to the intrigue against him; she is merely an unwitting accomplice, who is not told about the eavesdropping until afterward; hence she is also a victim of her father's deceit" (28-9).

for all subsequent practices of *mise en abyme*, but the self-reflexivity of the play occurs on the level of content as well as structure. Hamlet is a writer, hence his concern with forms, modes, and shapes of grief, as well as with actions that a man might play. As Harry Levin points out, in the second soliloquy (I.v. 92-112), Hamlet writes on his table:

> The business is characteristic; for, in the course of the play, he is called upon to do a good deal of writing. One of his poems is exhibited; three of his letters are communicated; and we hear of still others, one of which does him yeoman's service in his most dangerous emergency. His most important gesture, as a writer, is to set down a speech for interpolation in 'The Murder of Gonzago'; and he is so exhilarated by the success of the performance that he entertains the fancy of turning professional, of acquiring a share — like Shakespeare himself — in the company of actors. (18)

Writing is represented as a significant part of the play's action, but even more importantly, Hamlet's actions are always mediated through a rhetoric that is grounded in textual practices such as writing and painting. He has been

told by a ghost that Claudius is a murderer. Unsure about whether to trust this visible manifestation of the invisible world, Hamlet seeks other methods of evaluating the fact that Claudius now occupies the very throne his brother once ruled. As Frances Barker observes in The Culture of Violence, "Hamlet is obsessed by and incensed with unlikeness, and in particular, with the unlikeness . . . of Claudius to his father"; it has become "impossible to tell how much dissembling intervenes between representation and similitude" (34). In order to figure out what to do with Claudius, Hamlet deploys a rhetoric of doubt to generate a series of comparisons based on likeness or unlikeness. He first casts the comparison in mythological terms: "So excellent a king, that was to this/ Hyperion to a satyr . . . ." (I.ii.139-40) and "My father's brother — but no more like my father/ Than I to Hercules" (I.ii.152-3). In both of these lines, Hamlet's point of comparison is a representation — as Barker notes, "a copy" (35). Later, in act III, Hamlet again compares two portraits: "Look here upon this picture, and on this,/ The counterfeit presentment of two brothers" (III. iv.53-4). I will cite Barker's commentary on these passages in detail because he emphasizes

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Barker notes that "within this multiplex comparison, the satyr is itself already a doubled, monstrous form" (Culture 35).

the self-reflexivity of Hamlet's comparisons. The terms in all instances are mediated through other representational systems:

> Again not only is a comparison at stake – and, moreover, a comparison of likeness – but the language is overtly that of – painterly – representation. And the representations are "counterfeit," in a word which links . . . representation to the dissimulation of sovereign authority (and an authority moreover, to make, in coin, what are at that tokens, symbolic values, representations). Not only is there this insistent emphasis on likeness and unlikeness, but it is necessarily mediated through overt, almost self-conscious signs of representation. (35)

Hamlet's anxiety is the anxiety of hybrid textuality. He seeks to justify his actions through a rhetoric that repeats and doubles at the same time as it blurs insides and outsides. Because signs in one system refer to signs in another mirroring system rather than to some objective ground, they become caught up in the problematics of simulation. By rewriting and replaying the text of Hamlet in the contemporary scene, Aquin underlines the historical continuity of this anxiety in language and representation. He stresses that the problem of the body in representation

does not simply begin in the twentieth century; rather, its manifestation in a world where film and televisual technologies confront and compete with the written word is already foreshadowed in simpler cultural economies.

In Shakespeare's Hamlet, persons too are caught up in the problematics of simulation. Barker articulates one of the consequences of Hamlet's circular and repetitive logic of comparison – of "liken[ing] likeness to likeness" – for human identity: "Comparison has to be compared, and in the process, I suspect, more troubled than confirmed, as if an extra effort has to be made to pin down and represent identity that even as it is intensively represented slips away from representation at every point" (35). If identity is slippery within the field of representation, then its "machine," the human body mediated by competing systems of representation, is also slippery. Amidst all the suicides and murders in the text, and amidst all the deceptions and dissimulations among those who live, even as the body is intensively represented, the it slips away from representation at every point. That Aquin and his anxious author-figure Nicolas turn to the play is logical; here in nascent form are the same issues that Aquin takes to extreme.

The final scene of Sylvie's murder draws from a third important intertextual area which returns us to Roland

Barthes and his conceptualization of the edges of modernity through the Marquis de Sade. The kind of violence Nicolas wrecks upon Sylvie's vagina is the kind of violence that appears throughout Sade's writings. Libertine perversions scorn biological reproduction above all. Mouths and anuses are most often designated as sites of pleasure, while the vagina succumbs to all sorts of violent and sterile penetrations. In Philosophy in the Bedroom, in a scene that is remarkably symmetrical with the scene of Sylvie's death, the young neophyte libertine Eugénie attacks her mother's vagina with a needle and thread, sewing it up – "so that you'll give me no more little brothers and sisters" – before proceeding to attack her mother's thighs and breasts (363).

Her attack, like Nicolas', occurs in the context of incest and adultery, and indicates an anxiety with reproduction and with copies, but Eugénie's violent sewing appears to be the opposite of Nicolas' violent cutting. What the juxtaposition of two practices of penetration, one opening and one closing, underlines, however, is that both are metaphors for technologies of reproduction. With regards to the vaginal sewing in Sade, it is easy to recall the etymology of text from tissues and textiles. The opening sequence of the film Seven, as explained in the last chapter, further reminds us that images of sewing, needles and thread, are often metaphors for the specific technology

of the book and its binding. Cutting, as has been indicated throughout these pages, is a metaphor for the medium of film – for the physical splicing of editing, and for the cutting out of the world by the film frame. The intertextual dialogue between the scenes from Aquin and Sade's novels, then, represent to us the violences inherent in these sister arts.

It is undeniable that Aquin makes use of a wide range of sexually explicit themes and motifs, and the passages analyzed above should have made this apparent to even the innocent reader. Many critics have observed that Neige noire is a pornographic text, however their designation is often too vague to do justice to the way that this discourse about the body penetrates the body of this text.[1] Patricia Smart, for example, says Aquin's novel is "a complex, modern version of the all-too-familiar pornographic aesthetic" ("Women as Objects" 171). She comments on Aquin's awareness of gender-based concepts of identity and knowing as examples of what saves Neige noire "from being simply pornography and

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[1] For analyses of the pornographic elements of Aquin's writing, see for example Patricia Merivale , "Hubert Aquin and Highbrow Pornography: The Aesthetics of Perversion"; Patricia Smart, "Woman as Object, Women as Subjects, and the Consequences for Narrative: Hubert Aquin's 'Neige noire' and the Impasse of Post-modernism"; Françoise Maccabée Iqbal "Inceste, Onirisme et Inversion: 'Neige Noire' et l'identité apocryphe"; and Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier, "Le spectateur masqué. Étude sur le simulacre filmique dans l'écriture d'Hubert Aquin."

manipulation" (171). Nevertheless, the aesthetic of pornography may not be "all-too-familiar," nor may it be simply manipulative.

Pornography is a category that proves exceedingly difficult to define. To say that pornography is a discourse about the body that seeks to uncover and expose what is usually hidden, or that it is also a discourse of pleasure that seeks to have an immediate and visceral effect of arousal on its consumer does not distinguish it from a large number of other discourses about bodies ranging from science and medicine to lyric poetry to the tradition of the nude in painting. Practices of eroticism have of course long been a subject of representation, but pornography in particular, as Lynn Hunt suggests, seems to have come into being as a textual and visual practice and as a category of understanding at the same time as Western modernity (10). Brian McNair confirms this thesis citing P. Elmer-Dewitt: "The history of pornography and the efforts to suppress it. . . are inextricably bound up with the rise of the new media" such as print (McNair 43). These are intriguing points. Most critics of Aquin's work see the Hamlet intertext as one which points backwards in time and alludes to a high literary tradition while they see the pornographic intertext as one which reflects contemporary practices of photography and film. To see pornography in light of its

earlier literary history which situates it alongside Shakespeare in the history of ideas and practices instigating modernity is therefore to be able to highlight a number of crucial issues that arise out of this period of radical expansion in the available technologies of reproduction. Paula Findlen outlines these issues as they arise out of her investigation into early modern pornography (she writes specifically about Renaissance Italy):

> The history of pornography charts changing attitudes toward male and female bodies, sexual practices and their respective representations. It tells us something about the persistence of manuscript culture, the impact of printing, the nature of authorship, the diffusion of literacy and the process by which words and images circulated. In addition, early modern pornography was a medium used frequently to convey the image of "a world turned upside down" and its strongly satirical components make it a sensitive measure of shifting social hierarchies and the vicissitudes of intellectual and political culture. (53-4)

Findlen shows that an investigation into pornography and its strategies of representing male and female bodies engaged in sexual practices should shed light on questions pertaining

to the general economies of words and images. The intellectual interests of early pornography thus closely coincide with the interests of Aquin in Neige noire; both point to a reading of the materials of culture and their intersections with the body in representation.

Within the extremely vast tradition of pornographic and erotic writings, Aquin draws from a very specific sub-category – the libertine tradition. This tradition, which coincides in France and England with the development of the novel form itself, as well as the entire philosophical tradition of the Enlightenment, constitutes its dark "underside" (Hunt 33).[1] In its earliest forms, Joan DeJean points out in Libertine Strategies, the libertine tradition is not explicitly pornographic, nor is it even erotic; the association of the libertine's debauchery with specifically sexual practices only occurs after the eighteenth century (23). Nevertheless, the early genre as DeJean describes it shows many affiliations with Aquinian and postmodern styles

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[1] For analyses of the relationship between pornography and the novel in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Steven Marcus' The Other Victorians, as well as Péter Nagy's Libertinage et révolution.

of writing.[1] Neither a roman à clef, nor a historical document, nor an autobiographical text, the libertine novel in the seventeenth century is composed as a fragmented narrative that makes use of brief compositional units juxtaposed for effect leading not to conclusions but rather to open-endedness. The genre, moreover, generates a kind of intertextual play that DeJean characterizes as "dialogic" and "self-conscious" as it resorts to all sorts of framing structures and *mise en abyme* devices (26). As the genre evolves into the eighteenth century and sexual debauchery comes to be woven into the fabric of the libertine text, these other characteristics remain essential generic markers.

Patricia Merivale has described the link between Sade and Aquin in a lineage of "highbrow pornography" traced forward from Sade through to Baudelaire and the "Black Romantics" through to Alain Robbe-Grillet and the nouveau

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[1] DeJean remarks on the remarkable conjunction between the concerns of the libertine novel and twentieth century literature, and concludes "those living in the wake of . . . two uneasy, threatening revolutions share an enormous intellectual heritage. Modernity is constantly in the process of reevaluating itself, and occasionally it manages to come up with the same answers twice" (Libertine 27).

roman in terms of motifs and images as well as structure. Looking first to motifs, she argues that Aquin's text is filled with Sadian scenes of sado-masochistic voyeurism, and features sadistic *tableaux vivants* of "'la belle captive': a woman tied down, spread-eagled, sexually mutilated, anatomized, and tortured to death" (2). She could have added scenes of incest, mutilation, and cannibalism to this list of shared motifs. Turning to structural questions, Merivale observes of Aquin's Neige noire that its presentation of dialogues interrupted by an erudite commentator has "an effect rather like that of Sade's own Philosophie dans le boudoir, where a narrative almost entirely in dialogue, alternates with sections of philosophic commentary" (4). Beyond these two observations, Merivale does not delve deeply into Sadian practice, save to recall Barthes' reading of Sade which emphasizes his irrealism and play with the reader. A refinement in our understanding of pornographic discourse in writing and film

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Merivale remarks in a footnote that "Aquin has claimed, in an interview, not to have read very much Sade" and then explains that to her, "Neige noire seems more like the culmination of this very long Sade tradition. . . than like a close and earnest study of Sade's works" (10). That Aquin did not read *much* Sade is highly possible, but he certainly thought about Sade's work, and listed him alongside Shakespeare and Pythagoras in his notes for Saga segretta. See Guylaine Massoutre's introduction to the critical edition of Aquin's Point de Fuite, LXI.

is essential for an appreciation of how Aquin incorporates the conventions of pornography into his hybrid narrative about hybrid narratives.

According to Lynn Hunt, "Virtually all the themes of modern pornography were rehearsed by Sade; indeed, he specialized in the cataloguing of pornographic effects" (35). Interestingly, among the practices listed which produce "pornographic effects" that Hunt lists, the practices of intercourse, cunnilingus, and fellatio are nowhere to be found. Instead, Hunt itemizes

> rape, incest, parricide, sacrilege, sodomy and tribadism, pedophilia and all the most horrible forms of torture and murder were associated with sexual arousal in the writings of Sade. No one has ever been able to top Sade because he had, in effect, explored the ultimate logical possibility of pornography: the annihilation of the body, the very seat of pleasure, in the name of desire. (Hunt 35).

For Hunt, then, the latent possibilities of modern pornography that were explicitly manifest in Sade's work have to do with the intimate mingling of pleasure and pain, of arousal and destruction. The cataloguing impulse of pornographic discourse, like the rhetoric of comparison in Shakespeare's Hamlet, annihilates the body as it enters

representation.

But if Sade annihilates body as it enters representation, he also develops an intriguing relationship between the body of his text and the body of his reader. The explicitly stated premise of Sade's The 120 Days of Sodom, for example, is to catalogue the many ways human imagination intersects with the practices of the body:

> the plan was to have described to them, in the greatest detail and in due order, every one of debauchery's extravagances, all its divagations, all its ramifications, all its contingencies, all of what is termed in libertine language its passions. There is simply no conceiving the degree to which man varies them when his imagination grows inflamed. (218)

Arguably an early serial form, this catalogue proceeds according to a logic of repetition and difference that begins in the body – in practice – and then enters the realm of representation. Imagination, which "grows inflamed" like the body, provides the connecting link between these

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Sade's narrator advises his readers to study the passions carefully to cue in to their similarities and differences: "As for the diversity, it is authentic, you may be sure of it; study closely that passion which to your first consideration seems perfectly to resemble another, and you will see that a difference does exist and that, however slight it may be, it possesses precisely that refinement. . . ." (120 Days 254)

two realms which mirror and inform each other. Sade's narrator continues to explain the project of the 120 Days:

> . . . he who should succeed in isolating and categorizing and detailing these follies would perhaps perform one of the most splendid labors which might be undertaken in the study of manners, and perhaps one of the most interesting. (218).

In Literary Fortifications, Joan DeJean remarks on the catalogue form of Sade's writing:

> Sade's celebration of the potential of combination reveals, not surprisingly, basic truths about narrative fragmentation and fragmented narrative. In the final sections of the 120, almost the exclusive subject of the dislocated novel is the dislocation of the human body. . . . (302)

She continues:

> The 120 translates, more vividly and with more variety than any other text, the implications for narrative of the body in pieces. It is the human body that is cut up, numbered, and tallied up by Sade's narrative without narrative body: accounting gives the body a new, inorganic life in time. (302)

Despite its inorganic life, Sade's "splendid labor" with its machinic precision must, however, be inserted into

another sort of labor[1]: "it would have been too monotonous to catalogue them one by one outside the body of the story" (254). Structurally, then, the Sadian catalogue of pornographic effects must fully penetrate another sort of narrative about the body — one described repeatedly by the framing narrator as a "drama" (255).

Sade's narrator goes to great troubles to bring the reader into this "drama," as if he or she occupied the scene of the story in real time and space. In a direct address to the reader, Sade's narrator remarks on the company and cast that the reader will join: "And such, dear reader, are the four villains in whose company I am going to have you pass a few months" (210). Again, he injects: "These then were the eight principal characters in whose company we are going to enable you to live, good reader" (218). The distortion of levels of reality that this self-reflexive conceit permits is very similar to the distortion that goes on in Aquin's text. The reader is made complicit in the crimes that are performed within and by the narrative. However, aware of a

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[1] In Sade/Fourier/Loyola, Roland Barthes remarks on the economy of labour in Sade: "The Sadian Eros is obviously sterile (diatribes against reproduction). His model, however, is labor. The orgy is organized, distributed, ordered, and supervised like a studio sitting: its profitability is of the assembly line (but without a survalue). . . . What is being described here is in fact a machine (the Machine is the sublimated emblem of labor insofar as it simultaneously accomplishes and exonerates)" (125).

fictional and consequently non-truthful frame at all times, and granted no agency within the fictional realm beyond passively observing, the reader is denied the kind of double optic that permits a radical engagement with the text and its contexts.

As an actor in the "drama" which incorporates the catalogue of extravagances and follies, the reader of the 120 Days is invited to take pleasure or displeasure in the extravagances he will see illustrated. The narrator skilfully turns to another corporeal metaphor when he makes an analogy between the body of the text and a "banquet": "six hundred different plates offer themselves to your appetite; are you going to eat them all?" (254). Joan DeJean remarks on how this becomes a cannibalistic strategy:

> The narrator of the 120 imagines a most unusual space for its reader-to-be, a space defined by the basic techniques of bricolage and the recurrent nightmare of fiction's archetypal bricoleur, Robinson Crusoe – cannibalism. The narrator dreams of having his future readers strip his book of its "flesh," pick its bones, and consume it bit by bit. . . . Sade has his narrator request a type of violently active reading whereby his book would be consumed and its powers assumed. (Literary Fortifications 269-70)

Read against Nicolas' murder of Sylvie, where he sucks the blood from the incisions he inscribes on her body, Sade's framing narrator confirms that cannibalism is a powerful metaphor for all practices of textual consumption, including reading and spectating. However, if the reader "lives" among the characters of Sade's book, and the body of the text where the reader lives is likened to a feast, the reading of the catalogue could also be conceived as some sort of auto-cannibalism. The reader-actor consumes the very body of the frame which gives him life, and which gives him pleasure. Like the libertines in that "untenable, impossible, purely *novelistic* instant" Barthes tells us is emblematic of our modernity, the cannibal-reader hovers between his annihilation and his bliss (Pleasure 7). Textual production and textual consumption thus become inextricably imbricated in a viciously ambivalent circularity that moves the question of reproduction away from paradigms based on origins and toward models founded on the pleasurable repetitions of productive destructions.

The practice of recycling exposed by Sade is not identical to the recycling proposed by Lauzon but shares many of its qualities. Texts devour. Their production and consumption also devours. Aquin in Neige noire shows this economy clearly; the words of his text that are to be

translated into film images and spooled through at varying speeds, he explains, are "coupés par une sorte de moulin à viande" (41).

Limits of the Cutting Edge

> **. . . to link beauty and murder is to create an impasse, a no-way-out situation; it is to stimulate the desire to destroy the world, to "finish it off." (Virilio, The Art of the Motor 19)**

In this chapter, I have been trying to draw out the larger implications of textual metaphors. Cutting, as Barthes observes, creates two edges. In Neige noire, where the space of writing is literally intercut with the (virtual) space of film images, cutting describes the surfaces and depths of the textual technologies itself. The complex framing structure that governs the relations between word and image multiplies the number and kinds of edges that this text offers, and ultimately blurs the boundaries between insides and outside. The metaphor of the cutting edge applies to the content as much as the structure of this film-novel, however, and the human body becomes subject to all kinds of penetrations, bruisings, excisions, and mutilations. Murdered, cannibalized, and concealed from view, Sylvie, the carrying structure of the film, on whose skin everything else is grafted, becomes an icon of the violence in technologies of writing and film, and an emblem

of the spectacularly self-destructive and auto-cannibalistic economy of all hybrid representations (51).

In the last chapter, I suggested that the figure of anamorphosis might model one way of responding to the latent violence in serial repetitions through a dual optic that recognizes both edges of the cut rather than one or another. Such an optic, I argue, permits us to glimpse the death of language, and the language of death. The cutting edge may demarcate and push at the limits of representation, but when we are placed at these limits, split by a fragmenting logic of both/and, we become paralyzed and impotent. The image Barthes proposes to describe the works of our modernity of the libertine hanging at the moment of his bliss remains apt. However, perhaps to emphasize Jameson's blood, torture, death, and terror, it would be more appropriate to speak of "suspension marks," and thereby emphasize the visceral effects of hanging on the edge.

> **Images have become our true sex object, the object of our desire. (Baudrillard, Ecstasy 35)**
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> **The image creates a void, indicates an absence, and it is in this respect that it is "evocative." It is deceptive, however. . . . It focuses free-floating wishes upon an object which it masks as much as reveals. The image disappoints. . . . (Baudrillard, System of Objects 176)**

Chapter Five

The Body Dis/Replaced

"Our True Sex Object": The Image in Egoyan's Calendar

By looking at the relationship between words and images, my chapter on Neige noire addressed an economy of specular bodies engaged in excessive practices that permitted an ontological paradox: in Aquin's text, it is possible both to be and not be. The hybridizing, multiple framings and insertions of four competing media — film, television, theatre, and literature — into the body of Neige noire are figured through a complex of tropes that rely on both sexual metaphors and digestive ones. Offered as a supplement to the explosive expenditures of the body spasm of orgasm, the continuous motion of peristalsis and the cannibalistic practices of auto-incorporation ensure that the economy of Aquin's novel-screenplay is always double, always negotiates an edge. As the body makes its

spectacular appearance in the text, it appears to "be abolished, rendered immaterial through the phantasmagoria of both still and motion photography" as well as writing (Gunning 18).

In this chapter, I turn to an English Canadian film made for German television which once again powerfully explores the affects and effects of media, and of mediation. Egoyan's Calendar, like Aquin's, Fincher's, and Lauzon's texts, traces the signs of the disappearance of the body in a landscape cluttered with technologies of reproduction. Repetitive in structure and theme, the cultural economy of this self-reflexive hybrid text is figured neither through the expenditures of orgasm or excretion, nor through the accumulations of ingestion and incorporation. Rather, the film powerfully speaks about a haunting sterility, despite its visual and auditory richness. Here, landscape, architecture, and relationships are all markedly empty, and although technologies of film, video, photography, and writing offer pretexts to people the emptiness, they finally serve only to emphasize absence and loss.

The premise of the film's narrative is a simple love-triangle, made complicated by the interference of video recorders, cameras, answering machines, and letters that are never sent. The protagonist of the film, like the protagonists of all the texts I have discussed in this

dissertation, is an artist/author-figure. Atom Egoyan plays a photographer who returns to his homeland of Armenia to take a series of static photos of old churches for a calendar. He meticulously documents the scenes that he photographs with his video camera, and thereby records an oral history of the spaces he photographs which is narrated by the driver and guide, played by Ashot Admian, and translated by his wife, played by Arsinée Khanjian. Translator is traitor, of course. Through the journey, the wife's and the interpreter's conversations about the landscape, the churches, and their history become more and more intimate while their bodies are positioned closer and closer to each other within the frame of the video image. As in Aquin's Neige noire, seeing hurts; distanced from the action he is passively recording, the photographer stands back and watches as his marriage crumbles. When he leaves to return to America, his wife remains behind with the interpreter.

Narcissistic Perspectives

Calendar is predominantly a first-person film. Lauzon's Léolo borrows heavily from the conventions of autobiography, and as I discussed, disturbs the "author-function"; however, despite the coincidence of the director's body and the actor's, Egoyan's film does not

conform to the genre of autobiography. Rather, Calendar is indebted to documentary traditions such as *cinéma vérité* and essay films. What we see is either explicitly filtered through the perspective of the photographer who speaks from behind the camera in the sequences shot in video, or is implicitly slanted to represent his perspective in the sequences shot in film. As François Jost confirms, the photographer is in all respects a "narrator" – his gaze is central and controlling (134). Nevertheless, the narrative conveys very clearly that the photographer/narrator does not see what is going on. Although his gaze determines the composition and framing of the camera image, he cannot see beyond the frame. He records the growing chasm between himself and his wife, and the growing intimacy between his wife and their driver, but even when he replays these images after the fact, he cannot make sense of his own document. His chronic blindness is matched by his chronic deaf and dumbness. The photographer is originally from Armenia, but he has been cut off from his mother tongue. He has to ask over and over again, "what is he saying?" and despite his wife's translations, he never appears to understand what people are talking about.

The narrative perspective of the film thus establishes a gap in knowledge, understanding, and control. Commenting

on the visual framing of the film, Jacinto Lageira notes that the narrator is "foreign to the film" (66). By this, Lageira means to emphasize that throughout the entire sequences in Armenia, the body of the narrator is never entirely visible because he is behind the camera. He is represented in the film frame only as disembodied body parts – a finger, a thumb – and as a controlling, disembodied voice. The photographer - narrator is "foreign to the film" in another sense, however; his perspective is at all times informed by a radical alterity.

The filming and photographing subject, prosthetically bound to technological instruments, shows symptoms of what Marshall McLuhan calls the "Narcissus narcosis" (Understanding Media 41). Tracing the etymology of Narcissus to the Greek word "narcosis," McLuhan offers the following short summary of the myth of Narcissus:

> The youth Narcissus mistook his own reflection in the water for another person. This extension of himself by mirror numbed his perceptions until he became the servomechanism of his own extended or repeated image. The nymph Echo tried to win his love with fragments of his own speech, but in vain. He was numb. He had adapted to his extension of himself and had become a closed system. (41)

Egoyan's photographer, like Narcissus, mistakes the images he carefully and lovingly films of his wife for a person. He also mistakes what he offers her — a face hidden behind a lense, a hand holding cameras — for another person. By mediating all his relations with her through the prosthetic extensions of still and motion cameras, he becomes numb. All of the elements that structure Egoyan's film are in McLuhan's Narcissus myth, and these are the same elements that I have been emphasizing in my readings of Lauzon, Aquin, and Fincher: mirrors, reflections, repeated images, fragments of speech, closed systems, and numb bodies.[95] For McLuhan, the main point of the Narcissus myth is not that men become fascinated with themselves, but rather that they fall in love with "any extension of themselves in any material other than themselves" (41). In other words, this is a myth about the problem of technologies of reproduction which fascinate and seduce. For McLuhan, all media, all

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[95] For a discussion of Narcissism in Québec fiction, see Valerie Raoul, Distinctly Narcissistic: Diary Fiction in Quebec. Raoul's enumeration of the characteristics of Québec diarists recalls many of these elements: "The playing of subject and object roles by the self. . . . A perception of time as discontinuous, nostalgia for the past (unity) and fear of fragmentation in the present or future. . . . The desire to control by 'seeing clearly': scopophilia, related to epistophilia; also the need for a witness to the 'truth,' even if it is a self-object in the form of a fetish, such as the diary, in which the self is exhibited. . . . The use of language, not to communicate with others but to regulate self-esteem" (22).

technologies of reproduction, are extensions of the human body, but despite their seductive qualities, their prosthetic function brings about an attendant numbing of their correlated sense organs. Amplified by the lenses of the camera, the photographer's eyes in Egoyan's film cannot but grow weak; amplified by the technologies of sound recording, his ears cannot but grow dim; seduced by machines, the photographer cannot respond to his wife.

In his vision of a prosthetized, overextended, auto-amputated man, McLuhan uncannily anticipates the main themes of the discourse of the cyborg and the post-human.[96] Egoyan's photographer is not cybernetic, but his body parts seem at all times to be melded to technologies of reproduction. In Toronto, he is never far away from his telephone, answering machine, television, video player, remote control, or pen and paper. These props mediate all of his relationships, and disrupt the rhythms of conversation and the patterns of intimacy. In Armenia, he wrests the cameras from his wife and subsequently does not ever let go of them. In a melancholic scene, the photographer refuses to step away from the camera he is setting up to go for a walk, despite his wife's coaxing.

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[96] For a comprehensive collection of essays on the cyborg informed by perpectives from the humanities and the sciences, see Chris Gray, The Cyborg Handbook. See also Judith Halberstam and Ira Linvingston, Posthuman Bodies.

"It's not a question of wanting to go or not," he confesses, "It's much stranger than that. What I really feel like doing is standing here and watching. Watching while the two of you leave me and disappear into a landscape that I'm about to photograph." In order to document their disappearance, he must remain outside of the film frame. As a consequence, from his position welded to the camera lens, he asserts the "strangeness" of his desire to be a stranger – invisible, foreign, and other.

At the end of the film, in a message left on his answering machine, Arsinée, the Echo to the photographer's Narcissus, speaks about his hands:

> It's strange, but the strongest memory I had is not of any of the churches, but of the time we drove into that huge flock of sheep. You took your camera out, and as you were taping, he placed his hand on mine. I remember as I gripped his hand, watching you grip your camera so tightly, like you knew what was happening behind you. Did you know? Were you there? Are you there?

Her verbal description of this scene is perfectly cinematic, although it is never filmed because it is never seen by the photographer's superficial gaze. Her recorded voice fading into a far-away echo, she describes a parallel montage made up of close-ups of hands gripping. His hands are attached

to his camera; hers make contact with her lover's hands. A potent metaphor for the themes of touch that run through the film, the scene recapitulates the two kinds of coupling that run through the film: body and machine on the one hand, and body and body on the other hand. Arsinée's questions, "Did you know? Were you there? Are you there?" which fade into a far-away echo, explicitly address the problem of his knowledge and his vision. His narcissistic gaze precludes knowing. Preoccupied with framing, lighting, and composition, he neglects gestures and meaning. Involved with surfaces and appearances, he neglects depths. His narcissistic practices of image-making detach him from the corporeal world and thrust him into a universe of machines, screens, reflections, and copies.

Doubles

> **In those days the world of mirrors and the world of men were not, as they are now, cut off from each other. (Borges 67)**

Although the central figure in the story is a love triangle, everything in this film is doubled. The spaces of comparison, metropolitan Toronto and the countryside of Armenia, are rigidly defined in terms of a series of binary oppositions. North America's tight, geometric and claustrophobic interior spaces are contrasted with the fluid, organic lines of the landscapes of Armenia. The homogenous bland newness of the metropolitan environment

contrasts with the long-chronicled histories associated with the churches integrated into the Armenian hills. The dehumanization that results from the daily rhythms imposed by technologies of mechanical reproduction (such as answering machine and television) in placeless Toronto contrasts with the sensual richness of lives punctuated by vigorous and passionate performances of song and speech in Europe. The New World, and its representative in the film played by the director himself, is frenzied, panicked, and profane while the Old World, represented by the filmmaker's wife and their tour guide, seems pastoral, serene, and sacred. These oppositions establish an elegiac tone that laments the changes wrought by postindustrial capitalism.

Complementing and reflecting the doubleness of place, the film doubles its media of expression. Two distinct film media make up the body of the film: high resolution technicolour film stock is intercut with low-resolution, monochromatic video stock. Often, the same image is repeated in both media, to indicate a shift in perspective. Video images are always filtered through the photographer's gaze, while the film image is more fluid, revealing sometimes the perspective of the photographer, and other times an objective perspective. For Carole Desbarats, Egoyan's "cinematic reproduction of the video image" gives birth to an epiphany about the presence of video images in

contemporary life" (24). Video technologies have different characteristics than film, such as erase, speed search, and replay. Desbarats suggests that Egoyan exploits these characteristics to give visual expression to the desires and anxieties of his characters. In Calendar, she argues, video is used to "strip bare and thus actually see the workings of what Atom Egoyan calls 'the selective process of memory' . . . Here the filmmaker reveals the mechanism of an affectivity constructed from a back-and-forth movement between present and past, reality and fantasy" (22). Beyond the associations of video imagery with the skeletal workings of memory, however, Desbarats suggests that the insertion of video technology in this film serves a narrative program:

> Quite logically, the superimposition of images within the fiction entails the layering of the filmic narratives, and these multiple framings are matched in turn by visual multiplications of texture and grain; to regain access to a world buried in images, the hollowing-out of the narrative structure deliberately blocks the viewer's identification by a successive build-up of Chinese boxes, putting the brakes on a dramatic progression which is also deprived of the analytic resources of discursive language. (24)

The doubling of media of expression in Calendar thus generates a complex formal framing structure with a subjective first person narrator competing with an objective cinematic narrator to convey the story. Desbarats speaks of a build-up of Chinese boxes, but her observation is based on the assumption that the film was intended for theatrical distribution. She does not consider that the film was equally meant for television broadcast. Because this is the case, it is as fair to speak of Egoyan's video and televisual reproduction of the film image as it is to speak of his cinematic reproduction of the video image. Just as in Aquin's textual universe, Egoyan's film allows for no clear boundaries between structural insides and outsides; both film and video media fully interpenetrate. No single narrative perspective dominates the diegesis either. The objective gaze and the subjective gaze are fully enmeshed.

The soundtrack of the film conveys another set of doublings. In Calendar, the scenes on the image track do not correspond to the scene changes on the soundtrack. Conversations continue after the bodies disappear from the frame, and voices from different narrative times and spaces are layered on top of one another where they blend indiscriminately until they become noise, and then are separated, simplified, and become human again. Split from the image track, the soundtrack challenges the image of

unity and identity – of "oneness" – that classical mise-en-scène perpetuates when it grounds voices in the bodies on the screenspace (Doane, "The Voice in the Cinema" 47). Mary Ann Doane cites Pascal Bonitzer, who explains "when one divides that voice or, what amounts to the same thing, multiplies it, the system and its effects change" (47). Doane continues:

> This entails not only or not merely increasing the number of voices but radically changing their relationship to the image, effecting a disjunction between sound and meaning, emphasizing what Barthes refers to as the 'grain' of the voice over and against its expressivity or power of representation. (48)

When Barthes writes about the "grain of the voice," he emphasizes the way the voice points us to the material body. The cinema, he says, makes us hear "in their materiality, their sensuality, the breath, the gutturals, the fleshiness of the lips, a whole presence of the human muzzle. . ." (Pleasure 67). But if the voice in the cinema points us to the material body, it also transcends it. He continues to note that the cinema "succeed[s] in shifting the signified a great distance and in throwing, so to speak, the anonymous body of the actor into my ears"(Pleasure 67). Although the voice allows us to hear the articulation of the body, the

body in the cinema – not the voice – is immaterial and mobile enough to be "thrown" into the ears, there where it is not. By separating the actor's body from his voice, Egoyan's soundtrack conveys the radical separation of the body from itself when it is coupled with machines and thus provides a poignant metaphor of absence that connects with the film's themes of loss.

The soundtrack's disjunction of image and sound also multiplies the dimensions that the film characters move through; it becomes necessary to consider how the characters occupy two distinct spaces – sound and geography, soundscape and landscape – rather than a single, unified place.[97] The soundtrack doubles the image track, but the soundscape itself is at all times characterized by the co-presence of two languages. English and Armenian, English and Arabic, English and Macedonian – one term in the binary remains constant while the other, exotic language, is fluid and

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[97] I use the term place here in the way that Mary Ann Doane uses it in "The Voice in the Cinema," to speak of the unification of the three spaces of the cinematic situation – the space of the diegesis, the space of the screen, and the acoustical space of the theatre – through the signifying practices of the film itself (39-40). Doane explains how sound can be considered in terms of space: "in the construction/ hallucination of space and the body's relation to that space, the voice plays a major role" (44). She argues that the voice has "a greater command over space than the look – one can hear around corners, through walls" and thus is the instrument of demand for the child, who hears before he sees (44).

interchangeable. Language in Calendar is not dialogic in the way that Bakhtin uses the term. Although the soundtrack represents a "living mix of varied and opposing voices," these voices do not develop and renew themselves, interanimate, or interilluminate (The Dialogic Imagination 49). Instead, they slip by each other intact and untouched. The exotic language remains impenetrable and mysterious, while English remains flat and halting.

The language of the translator is the exception. Arsinée's voice resonates in both distinct linguistic spheres — in English and in the exotic other tongue — and brings to each articulation traces of the other. As the speaking subject who mediates the two men and their two languages, and as the actual subject of much of the language of the film, she has access to both realms of meaning. For instance, in a highly emotional scene where the photographer interrogates Ashot about his amorous intentions for Arsinée, she must serve as the intermediary. Her diction, which is often confused and confusing, reflects the dual interests generating the conversation: "He wants to know if you wish to exactly know how he feels about me, if he has any desire towards me or not. Is that what you want to know?" Two competing desires, and two competing modes of knowing both depend on the services of the translator for resolution. Arsinée never provides any dialectic synthesis, however.

She allows the conversation to take a circuitous trajectory. The photographer responds to her question about knowing: "Yes, I want to know where this is going to lead. I've obviously lost something very close to me and I want to know how he feels about that." Arsinée translates Ashot's response: "He feels that you are a too adventurous." Atom interrupts: "That I'm too adventurous?" She answers: "No, that the two of you are adventurous men." Explaining why Ashot feels this, Arsinée's translation returns to the topic of knowing: "He says because we know that we're talking about something and within it you can find many other things such as evil and the divine." The voice in Calendar is more certain than the body. What is known is "that we're talking about something."

Set in two locations, filmed in two media, and articulated in two languages, the narrative is also conveyed in two times.[98] The present tense of the film takes place in Toronto over a full calendar year during which the photographer puts together the scenes of his betrayal. He

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[98] Roland Barthes, in A Lover's Discourse, explains the discourse of absence in terms of two tenses: "Endlessly I sustain the discourse of the beloved's absence; actually a preposterous situation; the other is absent as referent, present as allocutory. This singular distortion generates a kind of insupportable present; I am wedged between two tenses, that of the reference and that of the allocution: you have gone (which I lament), you are here (since I am addressing you). Whereupon I know what the present, that difficult tense, is: a pure portion of anxiety." (15)

relentlessly pours over fleeting images of her in the video tapes that documented their journey to Armenia, and he repeats the scene of her leaving through highly scripted performances, acted out with hired escorts who uncannily resemble the body of his loved one. The past tense of the film documents the trip to Armenia, and depicts through beautiful, intimate shots of his wife, the demise of their relationship. The past tense of the film thus penetrates the present in two ways: first, as the documentary footage the photographer sifts through, playing, rewinding, and replaying, and second, as the performances of betrayal he scripts and, with the help of hired body doubles, acts in. In both of these cases, the past is tangible, material, presented as evidence to compensate for the absence of his beloved.

Scene of the Crime

> **Therefore, like Holmes's keenly perceived trifles, the camera captures the guilty one in a moment of unselfconscious self-betrayal. (Gunning 36)**

My readings of Fincher's and Aquin's work showed that the figure of the detective possessed the appropriate skill to respond to the complex problem of seriality in culture

and history.[99] According to Aquin, Sherlock Holmes, the inventor of the perfect crime, is the ancestor of all our literary history, which begins unmistakeably with a cadaver (Trou de mémoire 90). In Calendar, there is no murder, no mutilation, no physical injury, and yet a consideration of the film as a detective narrative is useful. From the perspective of the photographer/narrator, a body is missing. As he pours through photos and videotapes searching for signs of guilt, his obsessive sifting through material evidence of the past links him to both the criminal who return to the scene of the crime, and the detective who pours through it to find knowledge and understanding.

In "Tracing the Individual Body: Photography, Detectives, and Early Cinema," Tom Gunning accounts for the relationship between the mythmaking processes of detective fiction, the emerging technology of photography, and the systems of modernity. He writes:

> The narrative form of the detective story, rather than serve simply as an exercise in puzzle-solving, depends explicitly upon the modern

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[99] For further links between detective fiction and the problematics of modernity and postmodernity, see Glen Most and William Stowe, The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory; Dennis Porter, The Pursuit of Crime: Art and Ideology in Detective Fiction; Ronald Walker and June M. Frazer, eds, The Cunning Craft: Original Essays on Detective Fiction; Patricia Merival and Susan E. Sweeney, eds., Detecting Texts.

> experience of circulation. While circulation relies on an evolving process of rationalization of time and space, the very intricacy and speed of these routes of transfer and exchange create a counterthrust in which stability and predictability can be threatened. (20)

Gunning's comment about the modern experience of circulation sheds some insight into the nature of the crime in Egoyan's film. The world depicted in Calendar is one marked at every level by the modern experience of circulation. Although not exactly living in the global village anticipated by McLuhan, the people in this film are fully diasporic, distanced from the landscapes of their homes and from their mother tongues. The linguistic and geographic displacements of modern travel cause a disruption in time and space that permits absence there where there should be presence.

Gunning speaks of a process of "rationalization" and this comment suggests an important aspect of the modern practices of circulating – the circulation of capital (20). Within a system that literally moves bodies – people and products – around so as to create lacks that incite demands for supplies, money serves as a major rationalization. Money, of course, generates absences and compensates for absences; one of the core myths of money-systems is that

empty signs can be exchanged for presence.[100] In Calendar, the steady stream of escorts from all over the world come for dinner at the photographer's Toronto home to compensate for the missing wife. As double signifiers, then, the escorts connect the modern experience of geographic circulation to economic circulation. The madam's messages on the photographer's answering machine make the connection between spatial circulation and economic circulation most explicit. She asks only two sorts of questions, but both are about exchange. First, because her exotic escorts retain verbal evidence of their global displacements, she asks about whether they should speak one foreign language instead of another. Second, because she provides these escorts in exchange for money, she asks about the photographer's "account."

Gunning explains how the detective genre feeds into and out of the practice of circulation:

> The detective story maps out two positions in this dialectical drama of modernity: the criminal, who

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[100] Andy Warhol's Dollar Bill series play with the emptiness of the signs on a number of levels. Again, I refer to his Campbell's Soup and Dollar Bills for an effective image of the sterility of all practices of consumption in postindustrial economies. For an account of the relationship between literature in particular and money, see the essays collected in Anthony Purdy's Literature and Money, especially p. 206-232, which discuss a colonial situation that resembles Egoyan's Armenia in many ways.

> preys on the very complexity of the system of circulation; and the detective, whose intelligence, knowledge, and perspicacity allows him to discover the dark corners of the circulatory system, uncover crime, and restore order. (20)

As I said, the photographer's practice of repetition in Calendar links him to both of these figures. Watching video footage and reenacting his betrayal with the circulating escorts over and over, he returns to the scene of the crime like the guilty criminal, but also like the detective who penetrates the dark undersides of culture to restore order. But as I also said, the photographer cannot see. Unlike Sophocles' Oedipus, the photographer does not exchange his sight for insight. A poor detective and an unconscious criminal, he fails to recognize how the modern practices of circulation that he participates in fully make the crime inevitable.

The photographer makes a number of comments that reveal how his entrenchment within the modern system of exchange and circulation blinds him to other kinds of exchange. Beyond the obvious example of his transactions with the escort service, there are clues to indicate that he conducts all his social relations according to a paradigm that centres on money. Early on in the film, prompted by his

disinterest in the histories that she is providing, his wife asks him whether her services as a translator are only "practical." His answer, "I guess," though weak, indicates his tacit recognition that he relates to her through a social contract that positions him as the purchaser of services she provides. While for the wife, the journey to Armenia is intensely personal and metaphysical that reconnects her to sacred places with specific energies and fascinating histories, it is a practical one for the photographer. When he admits that he has not done research into the places he is photographing because "I am doing this as a job. It wasn't my idea," he clearly indicates his desire to keep the journey professional. He also confesses that he would not have come to Armenia, his mother country, unless he "had some reason to come."

The practical, for the photographer, is thus bound with an economy where labour is exchanged for money. The foreignness and strangeness of his reluctance to let go of the cameras and wander freely in the landscape reflects his inability to not work. In the scene where he finds out that he is taking photographs of a place that is not a church but rather a pagan temple, the photographer quips that it "looks like a bank." His comment prompts him to attack the driver. By suggesting that Ashot is involved in some kind of deception motivated by greed, the photographer cheapens

Ashot's penetrating comments on the histories of the area:

> Listen, um, before he keeps talking, I mean, is it possible that we make it clear whether he sees himself as a sort of guide or just a driver, because I have this impression . . .

His wife interrupts: "What do you mean?"

He elaborates:

> Well, he keeps telling these stories, and they're great stories, but I just want to know whether at the end of this he expects more money or something like that?

The photographer's question is legitimate within his own cultural economy, where the labour of making art, whether images or narratives, is always "practical" and always bound to some kind of monetary compensation. The driver and the wife are, however, both terribly upset by his implication that their transactions are motivated by money. Stories are being exchanged, she urges, as if he would understand: "He's explaining that the place has a history, he knows that history, nothing more." The photographer apologetically explains that he just wanted to "clarify the situation" but no clarity ensues.

Even in his conversations with the escorts which are unequivocally framed in a situation where money is exchanged

for services rendered, the photographer shocks the women with his insistence on the presence of capital at the heart of intimate transactions. When he discovers that one of the escorts he is eating with is an oriental dancer, he tells her about the first time he touched a woman, also a dancer. His intimate touching involved the mediation of cash:

> My father had taken me for my birthday to this restaurant. At a certain point, he gave me this 2 dollar bill and said "You're supposed to put this in her waistband." I waited until the dancer came to the table, and I pulled back her waistband, and she wasn't wearing anything underneath. I remember that she wasn't wearing anything. It was actually kind of odd, and I took the two dollar bill and kind of lingered there. I don't know, it just kind of left an impression on me I guess.

The dancer he has hired for his escort promptly ruptures his fiduciary fantasy by speaking from the position of the exchanged other. She blurts out: "I hate it when people touch me. When I dance. I find it very intrusive. I think if they want to give me money, they should shower it on my head. It's a compliment." Unable to respond to her outburst, he pours the last drop of wine and thus gives her the cue to get up and walk away from him.

The photographer is so immersed in a capitalist system

of exchange that he even brings the issue of money to the question of reproduction and children. When he shows one of the escorts pictures of his foster child Lucinée, he appears to be more fascinated with the photo-reproduction than with the child. His escort asks him questions about the foster plan: "How much does it cost you?" He answers: "Well it just went up. It used to be 28, and now its 30." She invites him to talk about what his parenting is worth to him. Her language, however, is the language of accumulation: "And what do you get, a picture, and what else?" His answer indicates that he measures value by the number and types of copies and representations, not by any kind of deeper meaning. He specifies: "They send a picture. Yeah, I've got a video tape. Yes, it's nice, I like it, I like the. . . ." He breaks off to explain that he wrote Lucinée a letter. He does not tell the escort what he says in the letter: as with the photographs of the child, the medium is more important than the message. He explains that Lucinée wrote back; her letter thus merely contributes to the swelling of his list of copies he got for his investment. The photographer then turns the questions back on the questionner, and asks the escort whether she has children, and how much they cost her. She responds with outrage: "It's a ridiculous question, you don't think about those things." When she refuses to provide a "ball-park"

figure that could be compared to his 28 or 30 dollars, the photographer again pours the last bit of wine that is her cue to stand up and leave him.

Even though she is the mediator, the translator, the one in the film who has access to both worlds, Arsinée does not wish to participate in the circulatory system that the photographer is swept up in. She wants real children, not purchased photographic and videotaped evidence of them. She wants an exchange of stories and histories that has nothing to do with jobs or practicalities. When she chooses to leave the photographer and her life in Toronto for a life with the driver in Armenia, she remains remarkably guilt free. The camera which follows her everywhere does not capture her in a moment of unselfconscious self-betrayal (Gunning 36).

And yet, she does not really step out of the system of exchange she deplores. In a remarkable scene communicated more through body language and looks than words, the driver she leaves her husband for appears to acknowledge his complicity in the system. The initial premise of the scene is a visual joke. Arsinée rushes to the camera laughing, and explains that Ashot knows how to "do a KGB thing, checking your passport." The photographer asks what that means, and asks them to show it. Initially, Arsinée and Ashot arrange themselves to act out the scene together.

Operating the video camera, outside of the film frame, the photographer is a passive spectator. Ashot grabs Arsinée's passport, opens it up, and looks at it sternly. The intimacy of their postures makes the photographer an outsider, so he asks them to rearrange things: "Let him do it to me, let him do it to the camera," he urges with a false laugh. Arsinée hesitates, and then asks Ashot to do it to the camera. With Arsinée's passport still in his hand, Ashot looks directly into the camera, nodding at the passport in his hand. "He wants your passport," Arsinée interjects. From behind the camera, the photographer hands over his passport. Ashot examines both passports in his hand, opens up the photographer's, and then with a sleight of hand, passes the photographer's passport over to Arsinée while retaining hers, now opened to her photo image. Ashot peers at her image slowly, and then looks directly into the camera, finally lowering his eyes introspectively. Ashot's look seems to avow to Atom that he too fetishizes her image. It also seems to avow that she (and her image) is changing hands – exchanged between men in a formal ritual with authoritarian overtones. All of the laughter has

evaporated, and she becomes unusually silent.[101]

The crime of the missing body in the film, then, is as particularly modern as it is inevitable. Attached to experiences of geographic and economic circulation, informed by a practice of exchange that carries with it absence and loss, and of course, permitted by the coupling of bodies and machines and their mechanical reproduction of copies and images, her disappearance, like Sylvie's death in Neige noire, is a logical extension of her appearance.

Scene of Writing

> **Écrire est un grand amour. Écrire, c'était t'écrire; et maintenant que je t'ai perdue, si je continue d'agglutiner les mots avec une persévérance mécanique, c'est qu'en mon for intérieur j'espère que ma dérive noématique que je destine à des interlocuteurs innés, se rendra jusqu'à toi. (Aquin, Prochain épisode 70)**

In an interview with Egoyan, hypertextualist Douglas Cooper observes:

> A persistent theme in your work is the point at which communication becomes perverse: technologies designed to eliminate distance between people in fact reinforce that distance. You have addressed

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[101] Lageira's reading of the KGB scene situates it in relation to the theme of foreignness. The passport is an "identity card attesting to his outsider status," and the KGB agent "examines it as though it were the Foreigner in general" (66).

telephone, film and video technologies in some detail. . . . (Egoyan, "Interview")

In Calendar, Egoyan also explores the technology of writing, and imbricates it with telephone, film and video, and photography in the same perverse paradigm. The practice of writing in the film is initiated by a message about the calendar from Arsinée on the photographer's answering machine:

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A Lover's Discourse, calls a "discourse of absence" (13). In Egoyan's film, the photographer is a skilled master of two technologies that exploit the illusion of presence where there is really absence – photography and filmmaking. He is consequently particularly well suited to the task of formulating this discourse.

Initially, however, he refuses to undertake the sort of

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past, they only search for memories fixed in images – avid as they are for mechanically recorded eras, voices, gazes, and bodies"(33). As Nancy Miller stresses in her analysis of epistolary forms, "the point of remembering, of recording, is to offer it the beloved, absent other"(Miller 144). In the case of the photographer's writing in Calendar, his search for the past fixed in his documentary images is supplemented by his search for the past fixed in voices, gazes, and bodies that are not mechanically recorded, but are repetitive nevertheless. What he offers his beloved is a contradictory message about her uniqueness and her replaceability:

> A strange thing happened today. As I was letting a woman in, our neighbour across the street, an old Polish man, called your name. I have no idea why he would think it was you. The only thing you have in common is your hair, your long, dark hair, which I still dream of running my fingers through.

This is where the perversity of the technology of writing comes into play. In order to finish the letter he is writing to Arsinée, the photographer precipitates a scene – over twelve calendar months, it is almost the very same every time. During dinner with hired escorts who more and more resemble his wife, at the point when the conversations become awkward and uncomfortable, he pours the last bit of

wine. Without consuming the wine, they take their cue to cut him off, turn their backs to him, walk over to the telephone, and begin to speak erotically in hushed tones to someone else in a language he cannot understand.[105] He uses the half-scripted performances of the escorts to trigger his memory of the past, and he responds to these memories in his texts. So although Arsinée requests a letter from him that takes him away from his prosthetic image-making technologies and into himself and his feelings, the scene of his writing still requires copies of persons and technologies that reproduce the voice.[106]

Through the course of the film, the photographer also writes a letter to his foster child, Lucinée. This letter too relies on the prompting of escorts and photographs, and the scene of writing, again, is marred by perversion. Here,

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[105] Marshall McLuhan's comments on the technology of the telephone are uncannily echoed in these scenes: "No more unexpected social result of the telephone has been observed than its elimination of the red-light district and its creation of the call-girl" (Understanding Media 266).

[106] Paul Virilio suggests in The Art of the Motor that the telephone is an even more startling technology than the cinema: "Cinema was an extension of photography and the kaleidescope, budding aviation of the kite and the observation of the flight of birds, whereas hearing the voice of someone alive and yet not there, who may be hundreds of kilometers away, being able to rouse them and converse long-distance with them in the absence of their body, losing one's own body in the process by becoming invisible in the eyes of one's partner: this was totally outside the experience of everyday life. . ." (59)

the photographer borrows heavily from the tradition of the love letter, and uses suggestive language: "Dear Lucinée, How are you? I miss you very much, and I think about you all the time." He begins with a comment on the fetishized photographic image he has of her, and then, as if melancholic about her absence, suggests that she present herself to him some day: "I showed your picture to a very nice lady today who told me how pretty she thought you were. . . . It is my dream that one day we will be able to speak to each other. You can come and visit me and stay as long as you like." After interrogating his foster child about his wife and her boyfriend, his language becomes uncomfortable. Echoing incestuous relationships, he urges the girl: "You must promise not to tell my wife. It must remain our little secret. A secret between Lucinée and her loving foster daddy." The scene of writing thus seems to link up with a primal scene. Like video, like photography, the technology of writing produces a paradoxical intimacy and reveals the limits of expression, where communication becomes perverse. Because writing relies on a serially repeated performance that involves still and moving images, persons who might as well be images of other persons, and telephones, writing maps out the spaces of simulation that allow bodies to disappear, spectacularly.

Touching

> **For me, the Photographer's organ is not his eye (which terrifies me) but his finger . . . . (Barthes, Camera Lucida 15)**

Peter Harcourt calls Egoyan's cinema "a cinema of surfaces," and he adds that "these surfaces are generally troubled in his films by photographic or televisual technologies of reproduction" (6). I would argue that the surfaces are not disturbed by photographic or televisual technologies of reproduction, but are rather defined and limited by them.

Throughout the past tense and present tense of the film, the photographer and his wife disagree about physical and emotional surfaces and depths. They have radically different ways of interacting with their environments. The image-making prostheses he extends himself with restrict him to a realm of surfaces and appearances that resist deeper meanings. Even when urged to think about depths, the photographer refuses. About half-way through the film, the driver remarks on the fact that the photographer seems to be interested in what he is seeing, asking a lot of questions. Through Arsinée, Ashot asks whether the photographer feels the need to immerse himself further in the landscape: "Don't you feel the need to come closer, to feel, like actually touch and feel, realize how its made?" The photographer responds with bewilderment and a hint of disgust: "Touch and

feel? Touch and feel the churches?" When she says "yeah," his tone becomes sarcastic: "It hadn't occurred to me." She asks, "It hasn't occurred to you?" and he answers bluntly "No." Again she asks, "You didn't feel the need?" Atom's response suggests that he finds her interrogation perverse: "What, he'd like me to caress them, or?" Arsinée tries to chide him: "You know what he means." But as I have said, the photographer's knowledge is limited, tentative; he does not really see. He explains: "No, I don't really." Abandoning the metaphor of touch, Arsinée prompts him to think about in more concrete terms, and asks him to think about the spatial relations that are distorted by photography. The photographic images is flat, but the world, she wishes him to recognize, is shaped in depth with outsides and insides. She explains, "He says if you had seen someone else's photography of these places you wouldn't have wondered what it was inside, what it looked like inside?" Atom's response is clear. His gaze does not penetrate, but is content to remain on the surfaces: "No, I would think that they were beautiful places, and I'd think they were very well-composed and beautifully lit and very seductive. Is that what he wants to hear?"

Of course, this is not what Arsinée wishes to hear. She is a figure of depth, shown as often in the background of his images as in the foreground. She often makes her

exit from his film frame in the middle rather than to the side by walking into buildings beyond the range of the camera lens. Unlike the oriental dancing escort who hates it when people touch her when she dances, Arsinée's sensual and mobile body invites touch.

Scenes involving a huge flock of sheep frame and punctuate the film. The sheep's bodies, moving in tandem, are so close to each they create the impression of one giant, mobile, articulating body. Their motions, rhythms, and the softness of their shape are extremely sensual, and the slow camera pan the photographer uses to follow their movement – their circulation – is as gentle as a caress. In the middle of the film, the photographer dwells on a piece of the sheep footage. He slows the motion, freezes and replays a scene of Arsinée running with the sheep. The clip, like the segments at the beginning and end of the film where only the sheep are in the frame, is sensual and playful. She runs and runs towards her beloved behind the camera, and in her odd run, she appears to dance. Even though she moves in space, the zoom on the camera makes it seem as though the distance between her and the camera is constant and unchanging. Finally, when she is close enough to be framed in a middle shot, she opens her arms and hugs herself. Looking into the camera, she mouths the words "Touch me."

There is no sound in this sequence; her articulate, vibrant voice is muted by the photographer's technology. There is also no touch in this sequence; his hands remain attached to his camera. Her gesture of self-embrace reinforces the unbridgeable distance between them. The images of her frolicking and gambolling with the sheep explicitly link her to pastoral myths and their "nostalgia for a world of peace and protection, with a spontaneous response to the nature around it, with a leisure and composure not to be found today" (Frye 556).[107] She is thus (impossibly) linked to the material world, to nature, to the collective body. The photographer, in contrast, is linked to machines.[108] Through her association with the sheep and of course the churches, she is associated to the Christian mythology of the sacrificial lamb – destroyed in her material body, and then resurrected as symbol, as image.

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[107] For an analysis of pastoral in Canadian literature, see Northrop Frye's "Conclusion to the Literary History of Canada." Frye makes an intriguing if not erroneous connection between the pastoral myth and detective fiction when he cites Daniels: "A world is created, its centre in the Canadian home, its middle distance the loved landscape of Canada . . . a world as centripetal as that of Sherlock Holmes and as little liable to be shaken by irruptions of evil" (558). Without intending, the passage indicates through the detective analogy the evil undersides of Canadian literature.

[108] E.D. Blodgett, in his essay "Cold Pastorals" in Configuration, makes an argument for the place of the machine in the pastoral. See especially pp. 156-157.

The photographer is thus characterized by his inability to see, to touch, to penetrate beyond surfaces. In The Art of the Motor, Paul Virilio cites a remarkable passage from a filmmaker, François Reichenbach, that might also be spoken by the photographer:

> "From the moment I owned a camera," Reichenbach goes on to say, "*I no longer felt the slightest interest in being with people, in living among them, unless I could get them on film.*" (9)

Virilio comments on the passage: "The camera would forever after come between him and all things; the miracle of industrial cinema lay in reproducing this primordial communication breakdown by the million"(9). This comment articulates what should be obvious: technologies of reproduction mediate – they come between. When extended through prosthetic media, the sense of touch grows numb, and contact and penetration become signs for aesthetic gestures that are intangible and indistinct. Not even the echos of repeated fragments of speech can change the Narcissus-narcosis.

In an interview called "Vivisecting the 90s," Jean Baudrillard elaborates on the breakdown of touch in the current cultural scene:

> Tactility is really that register of sense which is of the order of contact, not of physical or

> sensual contact of course, but a sort of communication contact where, right now in fact [in history], there is a short-circuit between receiver and sender. I mean directly in individual perception, not only in the world of the media but in our bodily way of living, there is a form of indistinction, of amalgamation, of indifferentiation, where all the perceptions arrive *en bloc* and are reduced to a tactile ambience.

In Calendar, such a short-circuit between sender and receiver quite clearly accompanies all communication technologies, and for the photographer, his bodily way of living reflects this tactile ambience. There is a paradox at work here. As Barthes remarks, "the Photographer's organ is not his eye (which terrifies me) but his finger . . ." (Camera Lucida 15). This, however, is a finger that is linked to "the trigger of the lens, to the metallic shifting of the plates" (15). Far from revealing the embodiment of the photographer, his finger offers clues to his own disappearance. The finger enters the frame of the video from behind the camera several times, detached and hovering between camera and world, to point out details. It remains in this intermediary space, never, ever connecting or making contact with things. Touch in the ambivalent space of the

hybrid text therefore becomes virtual.

Danièle Rivière, in "The Place of the Spectator," suggests a way of understanding the waning of touch in Egoyan's cinema. Drawing on the etymological connection (in French) between the material of film and human skin ("peau" and "pellicule"), Rivière argues that the visible, like the past, in Egoyan's film *is* fully material, present, and touching:

> Between film and skin, image and spectator, the visible is actualized in its material contingency, carrying out this physical action of an image that comes closer, that touches us. (100)

She suggests that Egoyan uses a "tactile camera":

> For Egoyan, "seeing is also desiring to touch." Here the camera is co-present with the spectator's body . . . but it is also a "tactile camera" reaching in, appropriating private images. The "intruder" here is the camera's gaze: its effects are destructive, insofar as it inhabits our environment, surveys us, steps into our place; but they are also salutary, since it objectifies or zooms in on our imaginary figures, revealing how we see the world, how we construct our mental images.(98)

Both salutary and destructive, his camera's gaze is like

Benjamin's surgeon's scalpel. She continues to note that Egoyan's cinema performs a dual function with regards to the body:

> The images are resubstantialized through the experience of time and memory as antidotes to the images of an objectified body that does no more than advertise itself, disincarnated by modes of representation modelled on other images, themselves coded and reified by communication machines that defer contact. (98)

In other words, Calendar, like Aquin's Neige noire and Trou de mémoire, Lauzon's Léolo, and Fincher's Seven, is ambivalent. The body, emblem of the economy of these texts, is resubstantialized and disincarnated.

Going Nowhere

> **We are trapped in images not of our choosing. We have come a long way to find that we went nowhere. (Gunnars 110)**

I have suggested that the photographer is not exactly cybernetic, but is nevertheless too intimate with machines, and too intimate with images. The images he produces with the narcissistic extensions of himself have become his "true sex object," the "object of [his] desire"(Baudrillard, Ecstasy 35). His work as a photographer makes him an explicit agent of mechanical reproduction. Henry Ford, inventor of assembly line production, commented in his

autobiography that "Repetitive labour – the doing of one thing over and over again and always in the same way – is a terrifying prospect to a certain kind of mind. It is terrifying to me" (103). Egoyan's character in Calendar would disagree. Another "repeating machine," the photographer is not at all interested in the "aura" of things (Barthes, Pleasure 40). He is unconcerned with the traditions behind the spaces he films, and he neglects the originals of everything he photographs. His pleasure clearly lies in the manufacturing of and interaction with copies. His wife talks about children, but he is content with a photograph and a videotape of a child he has sponsored. She wanders amidst temple walls adorned with phallic shapes, and he clutches his remote control. He invites escorts to his home – veritable clones of his wife – and reductively emphasizes their similarity to his wife while feigning a belief in their essential difference.

As I said, there are two delimited spaces in this film. The space of modernity is where bodies circulate and exchange creates absences, and the nostalgic, pastoral space of the past is where the wife chooses to live. What is remarkable about this film, what never occurs in any of the other texts I have examined in this dissertation, is that there is the representation of an exit, of a way out. From the perspective of the wife, Armenia is a utopia where

screens and lenses are imported, where histories are transmitted through storytelling and song, where reproduction makes children, not copies of copies.[109] Frye reminds us, however, that utopias are not rational spaces:

> Utopia, in fact and in etymology, is not a place; and when the society it seeks to transcend is everywhere, it can only fit into what is left, the invisible, non-spatial point in the centre of space. The question "Where is utopia?" is the same as the question "Where is nowhere?" . . . ("Varieties of Literary Utopias" 49, cited in Potvin 301)

Although Claudine Potvin and Louis Marin, for example, argue that utopias are transgressive – ideological critiques of ideology – their transgression is conveyed by bodies that are not there, and enacted in places that are not there (Potvin 300). How, then, to read the "questions" of postmodernism in hybrid texts when, to return to Gertrude Stein, "there is no there, there"?

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[109] For a thorough discussion of a number of approaches to the problem of utopias in literature, see Claudine Potvin, "De l'Éden à Babel: écrire l'utopie." Potvin's summary recapitulates a number of the themes of this chapter. She begins to note that it is a characteristic of immigrant experiences: "Changer d'homme ou de femme, de lit, de corps, de place: l'immigrant traverse toujours une frontière nouvelle, lieu utopique par excellence" (288). Citing Barbara Godard, Potvin also links utopias to "l'idée du double" (300).

We continue to manufacture meaning, even though we know there is none. It remains to be seen, in fact, whether the illusion of meaning is a vital illusion or one that is destructive of the world and the subject itself. (Baudrillard, Perfect Crime 17)

Chapter Six

Conclusions

In The Pleasure of the Text, Roland Barthes asks "Does the text have human form, is it a figure, an anagram of the body?" (17). The hybrid, self-reflexive texts I have discussed here clearly do have human form. However, while Barthes wishes to point readers to the erotic body and the pleasures of the texts of bliss, this corpus leads in another direction. These films and novels are figures and anagrams of expelling, excreting, violated, mutilated, murdered, cannibalistic, and disembodied bodies. The corpus I have examined is small, but the texts of Jean-Claude Lauzon, Hubert Aquin, David Fincher, and Atom Egoyan might be considered to be extreme examples of a larger pattern in contemporary Canadian, American, and European cultural production. Filmmakers like David Cronenberg, Robert Lepage, and Mike Hoolboom, writers like Leonard Cohen and Timothy Findley, and playwrights like Brad Fraser also present the coupling of the human body with machines of reproduction to explosive ends. Female authors and directors are not exempt from the pattern either; writers

like Anne Hébert, Nicole Brossard, Anne Élaine Cliche, and Evelyn Lau, and filmmakers like Sara Diamond and Léa Pool figure the economies of their cultural production and reproduction through tropes of the body that can be spectacular in theme and intent. When technologies of writing confront technologies of image-making in this corpus, the themes, motifs, and structures seem to be consistently haunting, violent, and violating: self-reflexive, hybrid texts appear to be anagrams of bizarre and monstrous bodies. The implications of this observation on how we conceive of the practice of reading books and viewing films are great. By presenting themselves as body, these texts position themselves at the intersection where nature and culture, world and text, author and reader, director and spectator meet. These texts make it appear that they stand where the reader stands, and speak from where the reader speaks; as a consequence, the reader runs the risk of becoming as blind to their ideologies, motivations, and functions as to the back of his own head. To conclude, then, it is necessary to return to Ihab Hassan's comments on "the question of postmodernism," and ask a question of his question: How to read the contours of postmodernism in these anagrams of disrupted bodies ("The Question of Postmodernism" 122). The soft reading of Lyotard's language games, as I have explained, does not seem sufficient to

address the battles that are being waged in these texts. And yet, critics who have paid attention to the battle do not always address the particular battlefield layed out by these texts. Brian McHale makes a joke that if certain critics had their way,

> postmodernist novels and short stories would come with a warning label along the lines of the warning on cigarette packs and advertisements:
>
> > Warning: the Surgeon General (or whoever) Has Determined That Reading Postmodernist Fiction is Dangerous to Your Health. (219)

To prove the contrary, McHale underlines the radical aspects of postmodern writing:

> postmodernist fiction is above all illusion-breaking art; it systematically disturbs the air of reality by foregrounding the ontological structure of texts and of fictional worlds. It foregrounds precisely what Gardner insists must stay in the background if fiction is to be moral. (221)

McHale turns to two recurring themes that postmodernist fiction returns obsessively to: love and death (222). For him, love is erotic and connected to seduction. The "violations of ontological boundaries" that he refers to are gentle (226). When he discusses death, too, it is the

gentle and universal death modelled or simulated by postmodernist writings: "Death is the one ontological boundary that we are all certain to experience, the only one we shall all inevitably have to cross"(232). In my texts, the erotic is connected to incest, rape, or total sterility, and death is linked to murder. Ontological boundaries are still being violated, but the differences between what is being simulated and modelled by McHale's corpus and mine are substantial.

Marshall McLuhan suggested in The Mechanical Bride that "No culture will give popular nourishment and support to images or patterns which are alien to its dominant impulses and aspirations" (96). If this is indeed so, then the repetition and shifting of the signifieds I have traced in this dissertation are alarming. So too are the relays that are established between bodies, technologies, and pleasures. McHale's "ontological violations" may be resistant, rebellious, and renewing of certain textual economies, and yet might nevertheless be "dangerous to your health." It is, as my readings have stressed, possible to be both/and.

The texts themselves, amidst their myriad of reflecting surfaces and abysmal depths, present answers about how to read the question of postmodernism. Aquin's Trou de mémoire suggests that readers might find an analogy for their relationship to his text in Holbein's anamorphosis in The

Ambassadors; a dual optic permitted by a mobile perspective enables the viewer/reader to see the sign of death emblazoned in the text clearly. Lauzon's Léolo, however, implies that one of the possible costs for the mobile, creative, critical subject who can see and interpret the world around him is madness and paralysing silence. In Neige noire, too, the spectating and reading subject who possesses the ability both to see and not see and be and not be literally hovers over the edge of the abyss. Egoyan's Calendar, the narrative that most explicitly represents the disappearance of the body, proposes a radical concept – the possibility of stepping out of the frame. In its nostalgic depiction of a utopia where screens and lenses are imported, where histories are transmitted through storytelling and song rather than books and films, where reproduction makes children and not copies of copies, Calendar is the only text in my corpus that represents even the possibility of an exit. The illusion of meaning in Egoyan's film (I say illusion because the utopia is nowhere – modernity's economy of reproduction, consumption, circulation, and exchange seems to be all encompassing) can be vital, not necessarily destructive of the world and the subject, but it rests on a paradox that is at the same time utterly sensible. The body in the text is resubstantialized when it steps away from the text. It remains to be seen, in fact, whether the

correlation of bodies and technologies of reproduction – particularly moving images and written words – can generate other reading strategies, other points of resistance.

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